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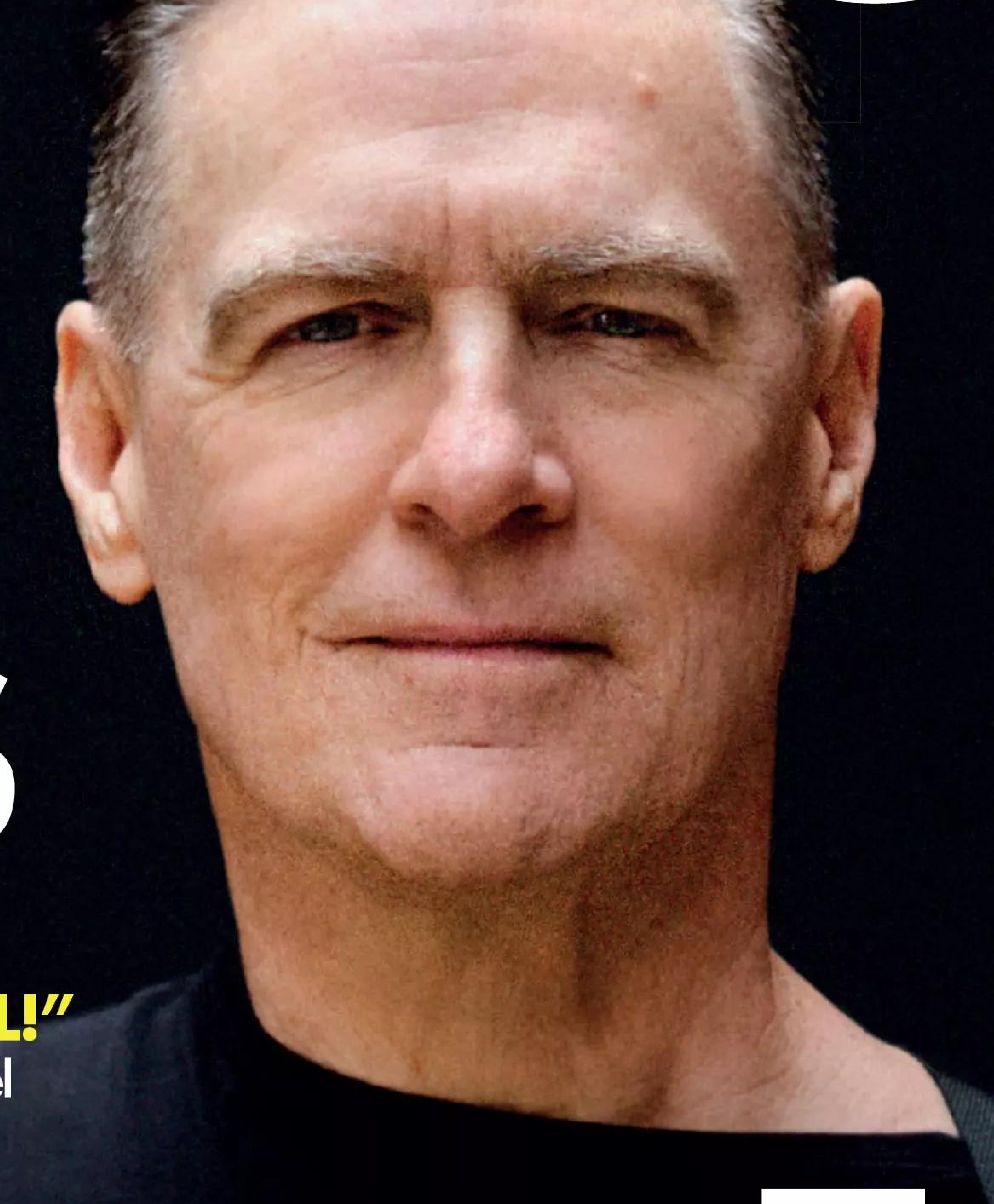

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

BRYAN ADAMS

"I WAS EMBOLDENED BY THE FREEDOM. IT FEELS LIKE I'VE BEEN LET OUT OF SCHOOL!"

The Canadian icon launches his own record label and unveils new album *Roll With The Punches*

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TONY HADLEY

"THERE'S NOTHING WORSE THAN AN ARTIST WHO DENIES THEIR PAST"

SAINT ETIENNE

INSIDE THEIR STAR-STUDDED FAREWELL RECORD: "IT WAS DEFINITELY EMOTIONAL"

Belinda CARLISLE
HEAVEN ON EARTH
BELINDA CARLISLE
HEAVEN ON EARTH

BELINDA CARLISLE

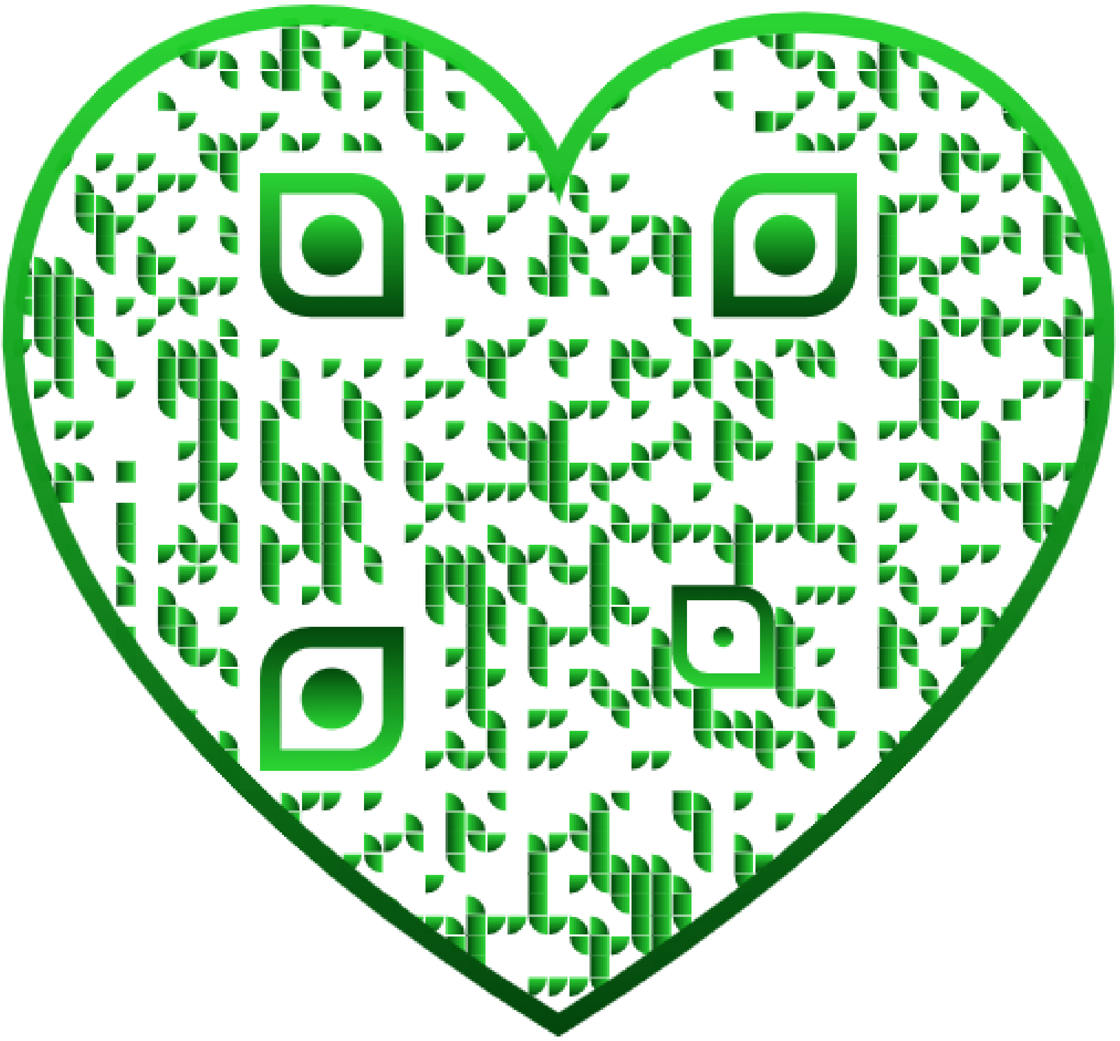
HEAVEN ON EARTH REVISITED AND POP COVERS LP REVEALED

+

LEVEL 42

Mark King and Mike Lindup on their global breakthrough with *World Machine*: "The band were ready and confident!"

PLUS JOHNNY MARR • M/ROBIN SCOTT • JUSTIN CURRIE AND MUCH MORE!



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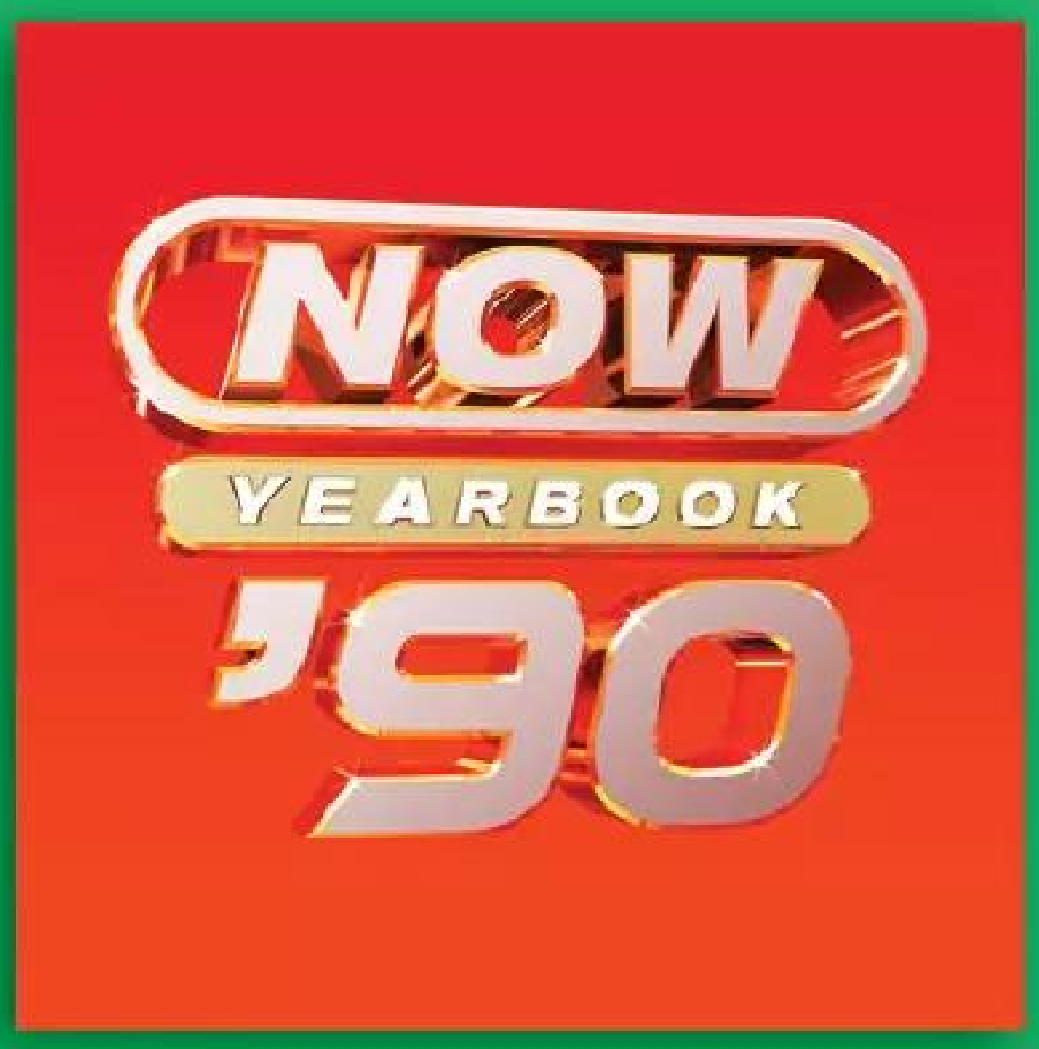
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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

Is it just me or have we been in short supply of proper guitar heroes over the last few decades?

Now I don't mean the acoustic-wielding sensitive singer-songwriter types such as Ed Sheeran or Lewis Capaldi, I'm talking about the players who'd stand on top of a mountain in a glamorous video location with their long mane billowing in the wind as they reel off a dazzling solo, or indie legends with fretboard skills that defy logic.

For an example of the latter, check out the sterling work of my favourite guitarist, Johnny Marr, in our latest album by album feature.

We can at least depend on this month's cover star Bryan Adams to big up the charms of the electric six-string and there's plenty of proof of the Canadian icon's enduring love for the instrument throughout his feisty new LP, *Roll With The Punches*.

And if you want a perfect example of the way an overdriven axe can make pop leap out of the speakers, take a look at this issue's classic album feature – Belinda Carlisle's stunning *Heaven On Earth*. Now there's a record that wasn't shy in adding some guitar grit to brilliant earworm melodies.

In fact, this month we have 'Bonus Belinda' – in addition to our classic album deep dive, we catch up with the legend herself about her forthcoming new covers long-player of 60s and 70s pop songs that soundtracked the singer's youth in the Golden State, *Once Upon A Time In California*.

Elsewhere, we continue to jump around the stylistic map and meet Tony Hadley to hear how his own childhood inspirations within the family home have prompted his upcoming tour of big band music that sees him tackling the crooners and reinventing some Spandau gems along the way.

And *CP* wipes a collective tear from our eyes as the mighty Saint Etienne say a fond farewell – we talk to Sarah, Bob and Pete and hear how the star-studded *International* will be their final studio album. With the A-list help of Vince Clarke, Nick Heyward and Confidence Man on board, the group is definitely going out on a high.

And speaking of blubbing, as I send this latest issue of *Classic Pop* to press I'm less than 24 hours away from heading off to Cardiff's Principality Stadium for the first Oasis reunion show. As a diehard fan, it will no doubt be a lump-in-the-throat moment for me when the band finally emerge onstage.

Let's just hope Liam doesn't throw any more plums at Noel's head beforehand.

Enjoy the issue!

Steve

Steve Harnell, Senior Editor
Follow me on X (Twitter): @steve_harnell

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CLASSIC POP
eighties electronic eclectic
BRYAN ADAMS
EXCLUSIVE SUBSCRIBER COVER

CLASSIC POP

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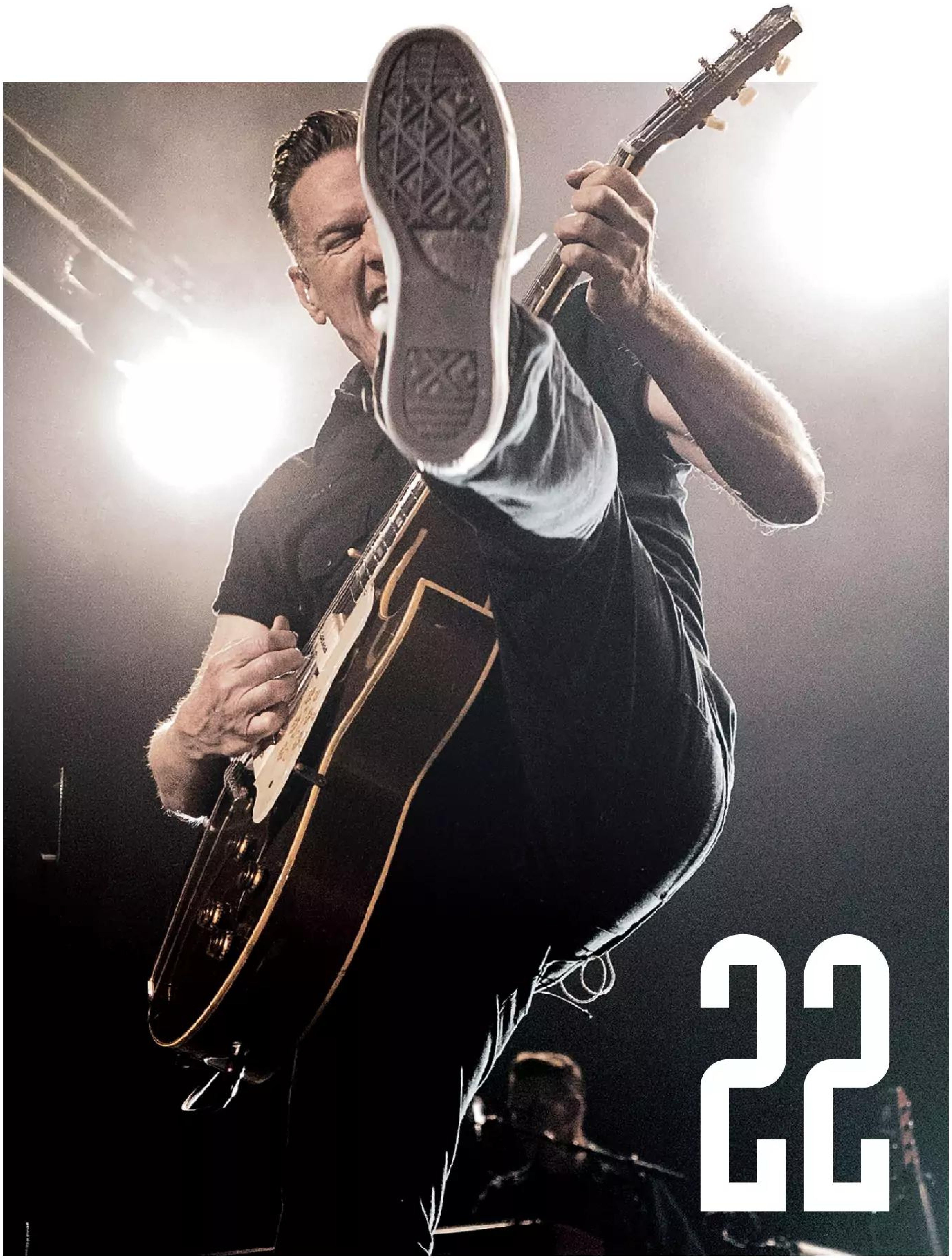

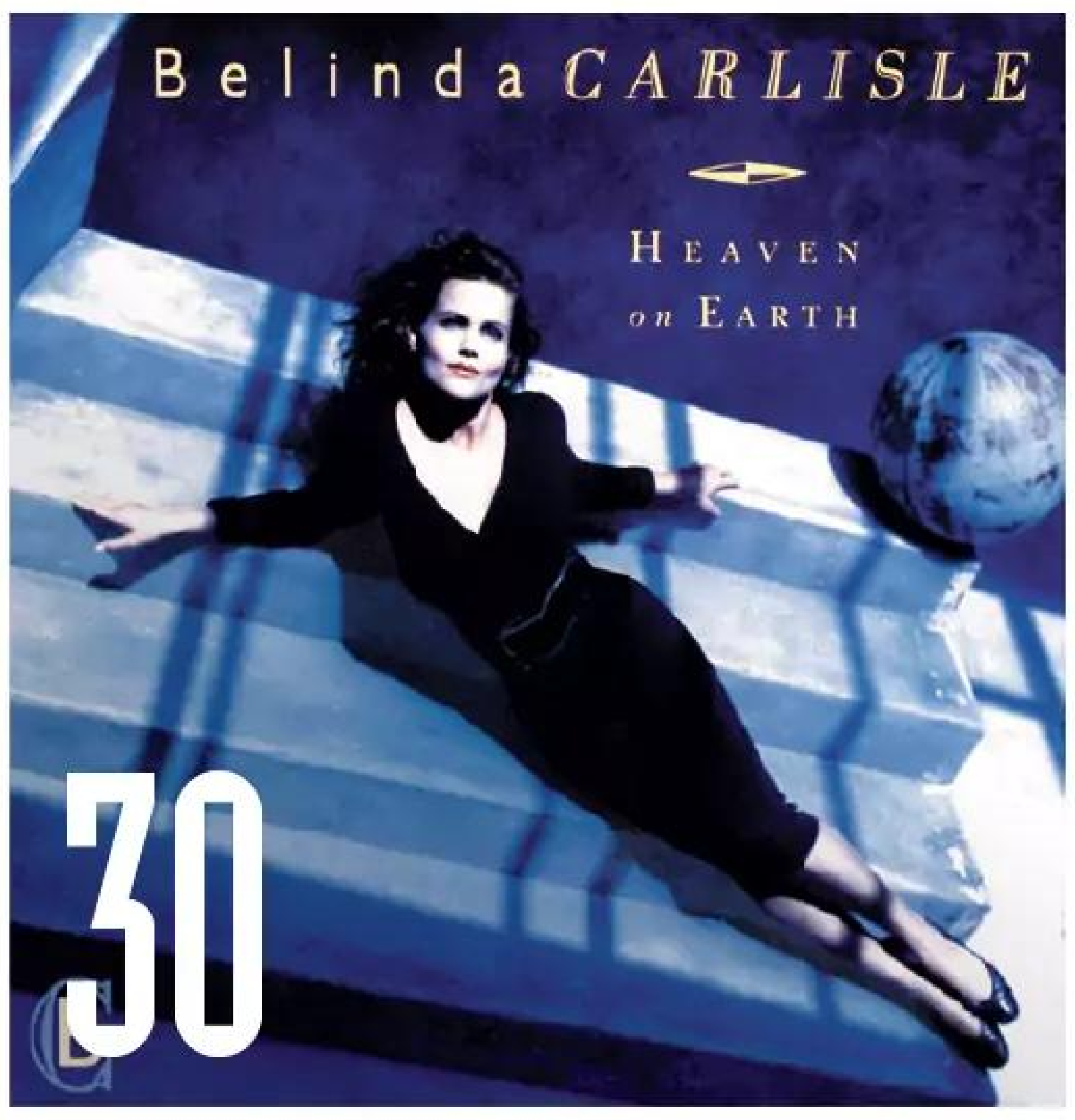
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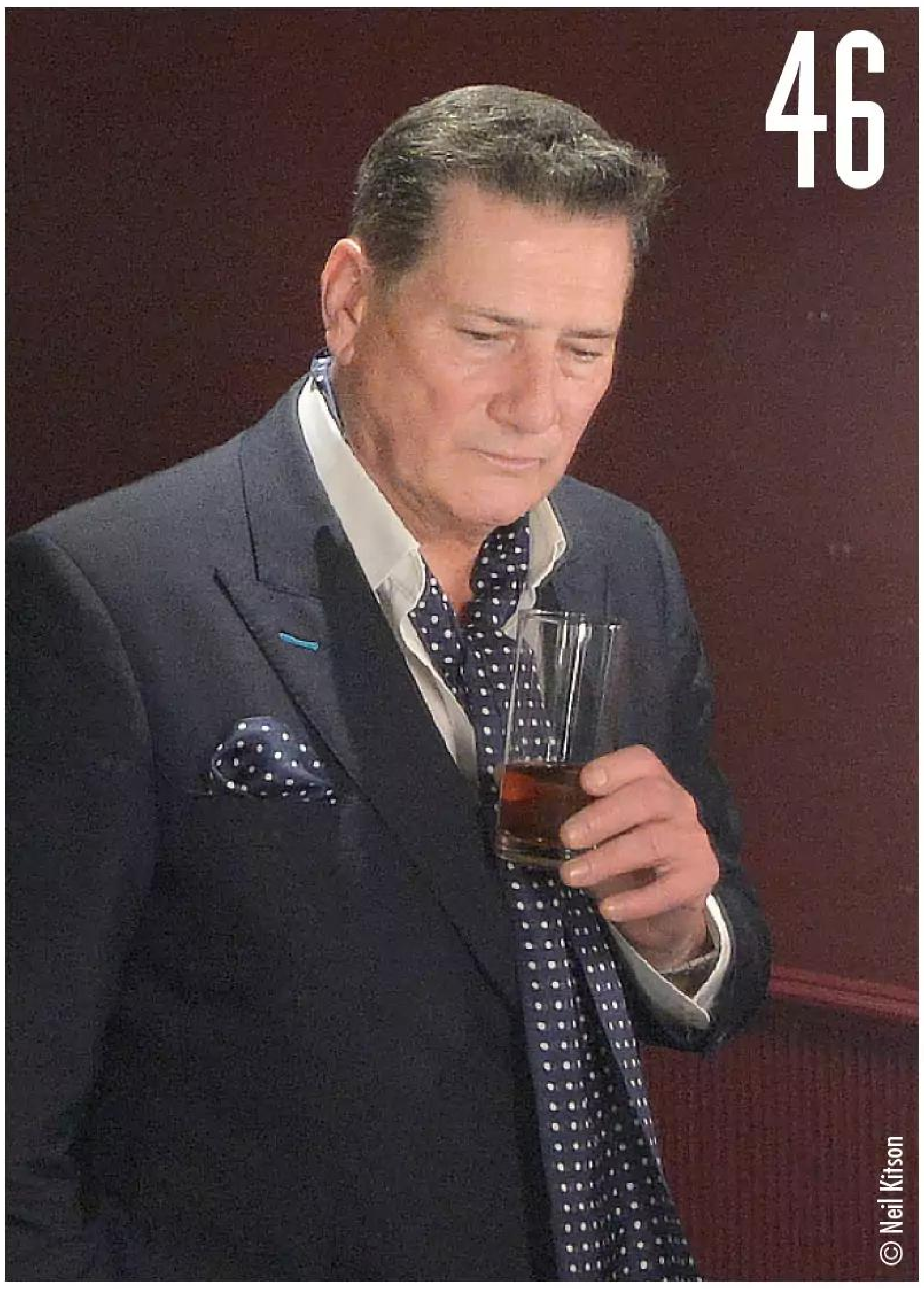

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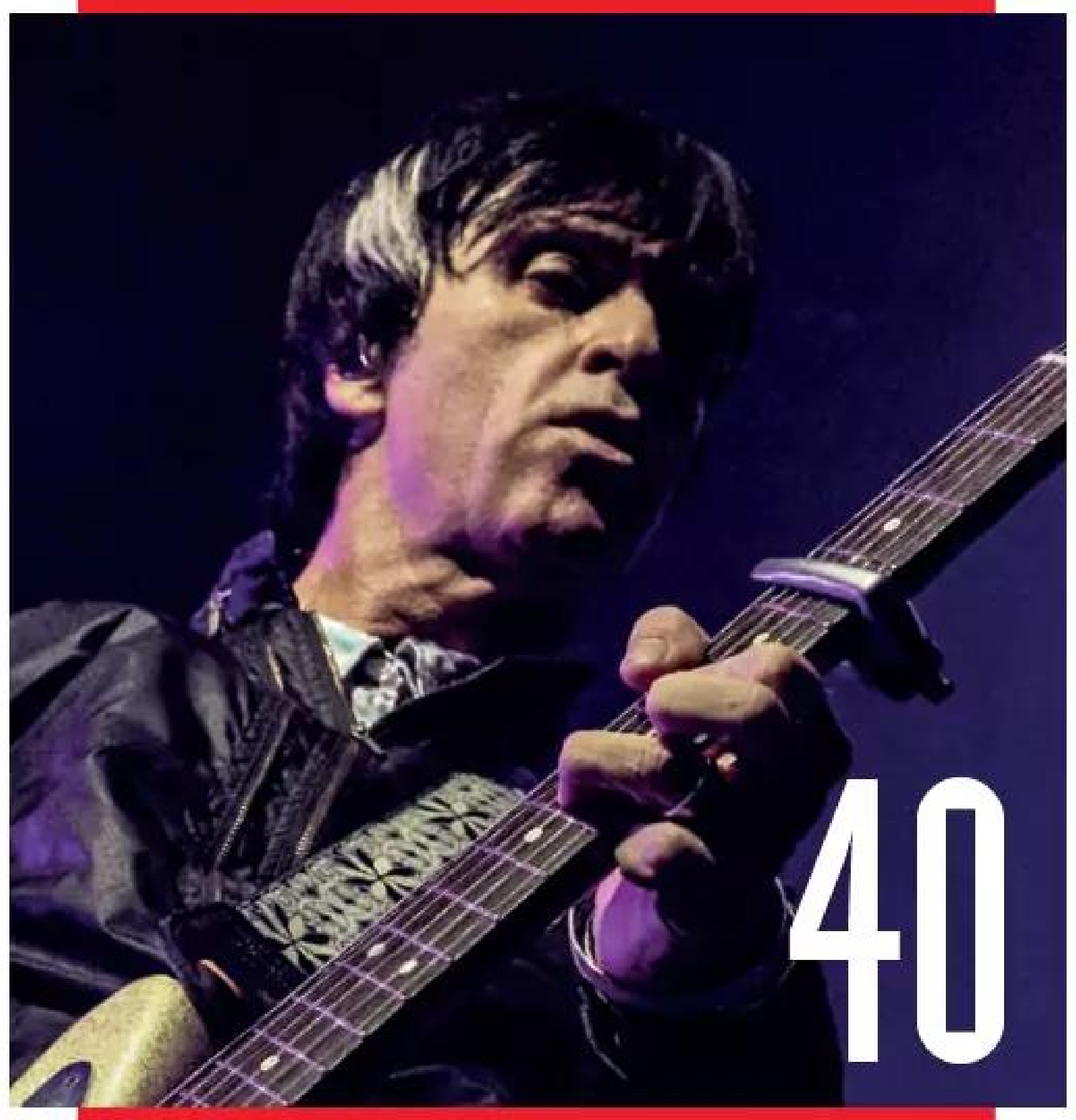

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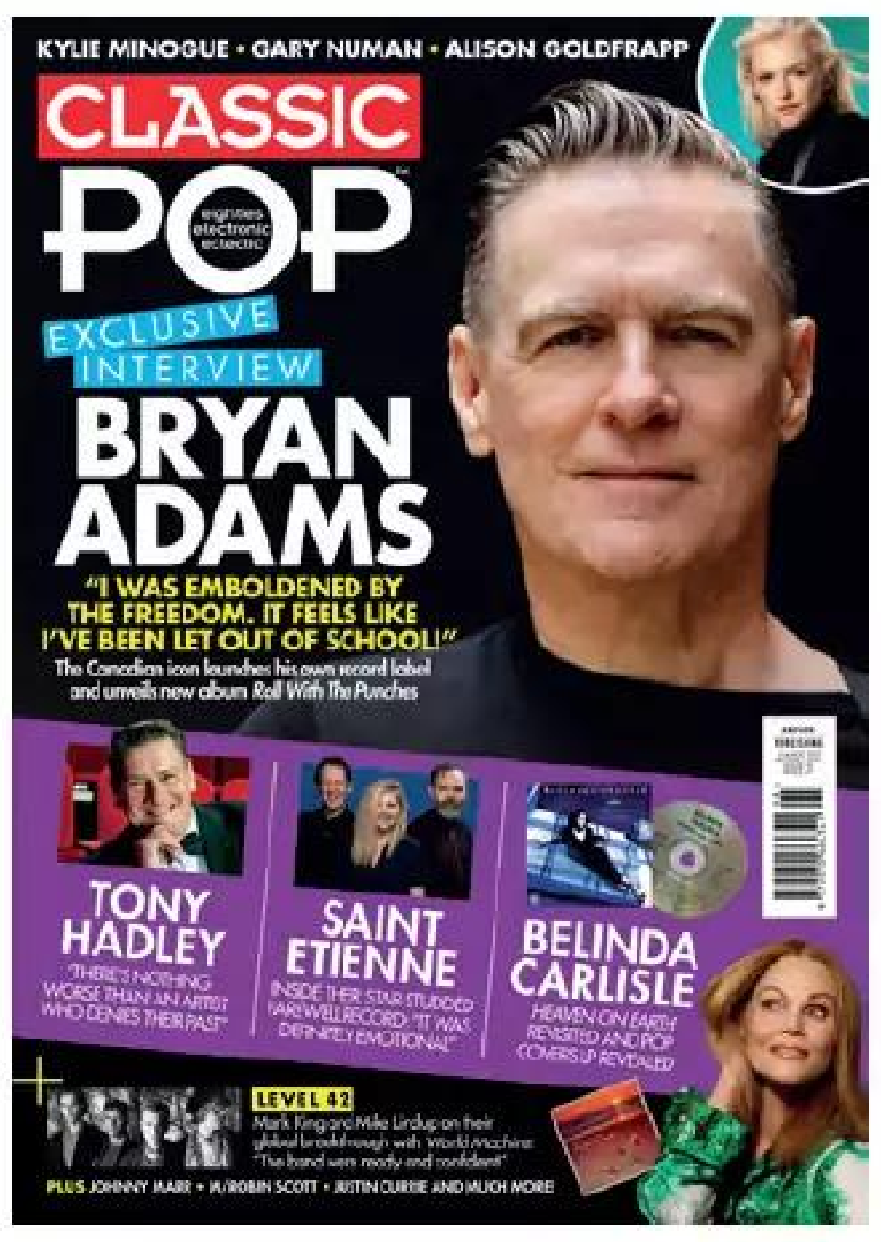
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*1 "Caron Wheeler on top form with a dream production duo of Jazzie B and Nellee Hooper."

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*3 "Moody, literate dance-pop, with a bonus history lesson about Lenin's return from exile."

*4 "I fell so head over heels with *Relax*, that I was beyond myself waiting for Frankie's follow-up. It didn't disappoint."

*5 "The ultimate 80s powerhouse anthem."

*6 "Not overplayed, and still a floorfiller today. An anthem, of sorts, for pop's many outsiders."

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Felix Rowe has extensively toured the US, performed with a Chili Pepper, barbecued with a Blues Brother and shared a Mars bar with George Martin. He has written for publications including *Classic Pop*, *Vintage Rock*, *Clash*, *Long Live Vinyl*, *Louder* and *Record Collector*. This issue, Felix catches up with Bryan Adams for our exclusive cover feature and revisits Belinda Carlisle's *Heaven On Earth* album.

The winner of the Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, *CP*'s Reviews Editor **John Earls** meets Tony Hadley to talk about his forthcoming big band tour and also interviews Level 42's Mark King and Mike Lindup who take us inside the band's global breakthrough album *World Machine*.

Paul Kirkley makes his living from interviewing famous people with much more interesting and glamorous lives than his own. He is also, to the best of his knowledge, the only paid TV critic for a national supermarket chain. In our latest issue, Paul talks to Saint Etienne about their farewell album *International* and also interviews Justin Currie about his emotive new memoir *The Tremolo Diaries*.

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POP UP

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A-HA FRONTMAN DIAGNOSED WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE

A-ha's Morten Harket has announced that he's been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. "I've got no problem accepting the diagnosis," he said in a statement on 4 June.

The news, relayed by a-ha's biographer Jan Omdahl, had remained private with only a few people in Harket's immediate circle aware of his condition. It was reported on the band's website that the singer underwent a neurosurgical procedure in June 2024 in which electrodes were implanted inside the left side of his brain. These were then connected to a small pacemaker-like device placed under the skin of Harket's upper chest that sends electrical impulses through the electrodes into his brain.

This advanced neurological treatment is called deep brain stimulation (DBS).

Doctors proclaimed the procedure a success and many of Harket's physical symptoms practically vanished.

In December 2024, the singer then underwent a similar procedure on the right side of his brain, which was also successful.

In a message to the group's fans, Harket explained: "Don't worry about me. Find out who you want to be – a process that can be new each and every day. Be good servants of nature, the very basis of our existence, and care for the environment while it is still possible to do so."

Magne Furuholmen showed his support for his bandmate on Instagram adding: "It is a day of sad news in A-ha world. Having known about Morten's diagnosis for some time does not take the force out of the blow, nor diminish the impact it has had, and will continue have, on us – as people and as a band."

SPANDAU BOXSET WILL REVISIT THE BAND'S EARLY YEARS

A comprehensive nine-disc boxset featuring Spandau Ballet's first two albums, *Journeys To Glory* (1981) and the following year's *Diamond* on vinyl, alongside a wealth of previously unavailable material, will be released on 12 September via Parlophone.

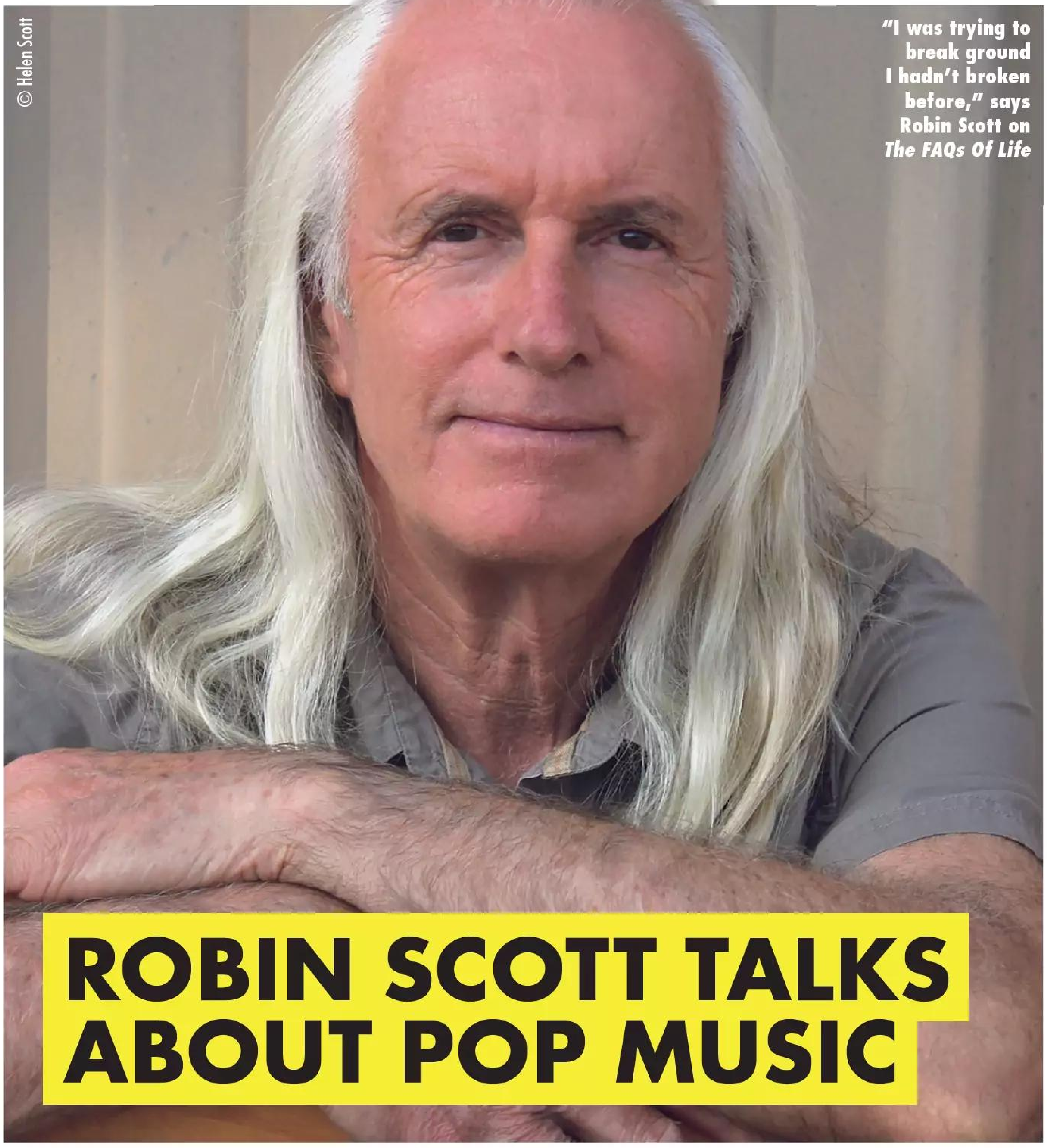
Everything Is Now – Vol.1: 1978-1982 captures the band's meteoric rise from Blitz Club favourites to chart-topping innovators. The set includes their studio albums from the era, plus six CDs of singles, remixes, BBC sessions, demos as well as a Blu-ray of Dolby Atmos mixes, videos and rare live footage.

Songwriter Gary Kemp said: "I was having a conversation with Spandau's manager and lifelong friend Steve Dagger. We were talking about my kids who are constantly listening to and streaming old music, making discoveries like Steely Dan or The Zombies. On TikTok and social media old tracks are getting reinvented. Our streaming is going up and up for people of all ages. Dagger said, 'The thing is everything is now.' I said, 'That's the title.' It isn't the past anymore. It's in constant re-evaluation and people are discovering it."

Featuring all the band's early classics including *To Cut A Long Story Short*, *Chant No.1*, *Muscle Bound*, *Paint Me Down*, *Instinction* and *She Loved Like Diamond*, the boxset presents multiple versions of tracks that trace their development from initial demos to extended 12" club mixes. The Blu-ray component includes original music videos, BBC TV appearances and the complete 56-minute concert from New York's Underground Club in 1981. For more information, visit spandauballet.com.

EVERYTHING IS NOW
SPANDAU BALLET
THE EARLY YEARS 1978-1982
DIAMOND

● **Turn to page 46 for our interview with Spandau's Tony Hadley**



© Helen Scott

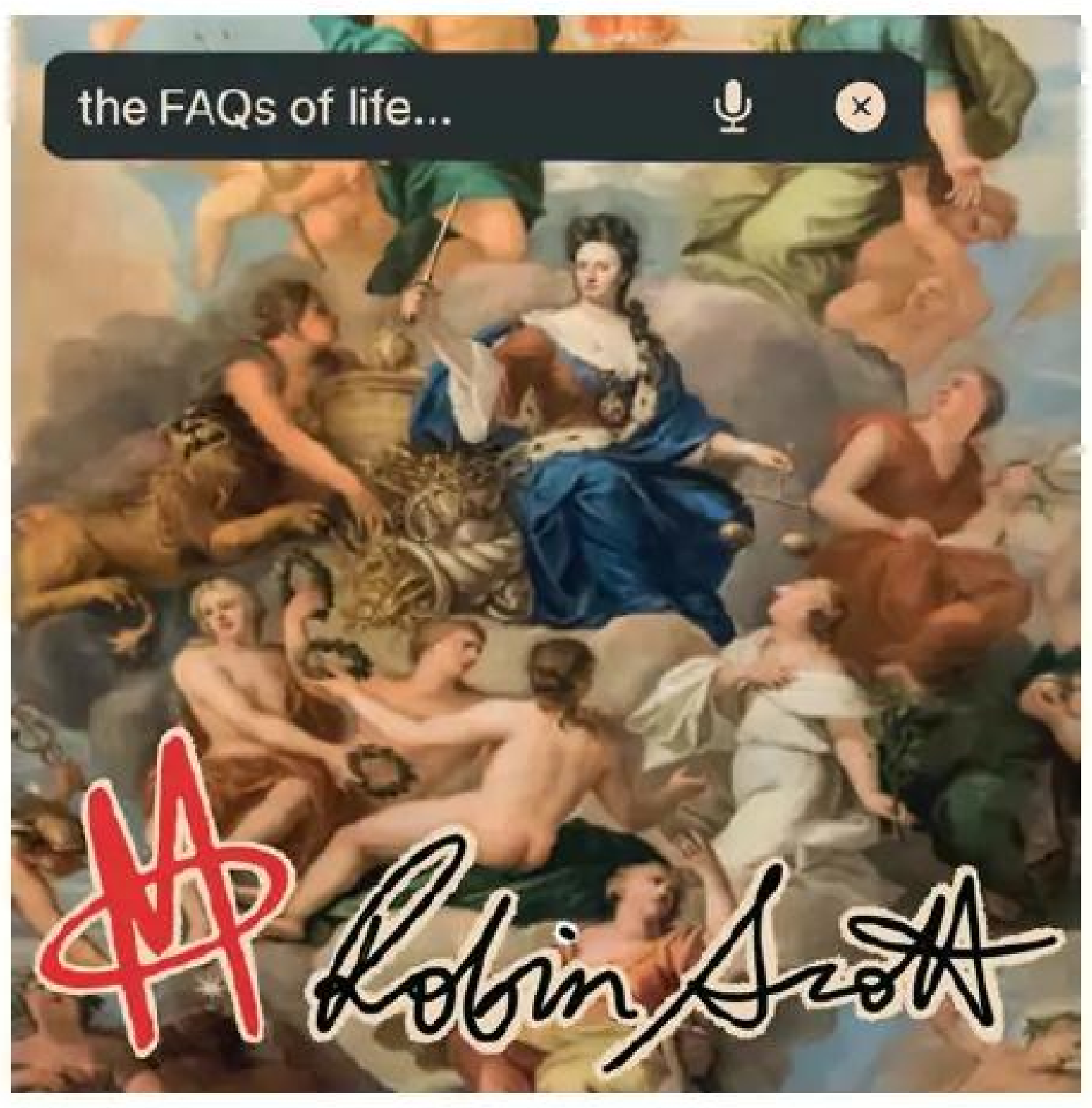
"I was trying to break ground I hadn't broken before," says Robin Scott on *The FAQs Of Life*

ROBIN SCOTT TALKS ABOUT POP MUSIC

Robin Scott, the mastermind behind M's indelible 1979 smash *Pop Muzik*, has revived the project for a new album, *The FAQs Of Life*. Although he's recorded under his own name in the meantime, including 2017's *Emotional DNA* (reissued in 2021 as *Wing And A Prayer*), it'll be the first time he's employed the moniker since 1982's *Famous Last Words*.

"On *Emotional DNA*," Scott explains, "I was reflecting on my early days as a singer-songwriter, and morphing gently back into M territory.

"It all came about pretty organically, but I just felt, 'Why the separation?' [Resurrecting the name] has something to do with integrating the two directions which have been ongoing throughout my career."



The FAQs... follows this year's expanded edition of M's debut, *New York-London-Paris-Munich* (see *Forget Me Not* on page 66), and *Pop Muzik*'s recent viral revival on TikTok. "It's good to see all those young kids doing their thing to it," he grins. "It's incredible! It's more global now than ever! The whole arrangement between those that are posting on TikTok and choosing a track is very creative. Suddenly you can play a part as a member of this new generation."

Scott's latest album's origins lie in the pandemic, when he built a home studio in Wales. "I'd heard about bedroom recording scenarios," he says. "I was trying to break ground I hadn't broken before. I didn't really want to have that distinction of being, if you like, the 'Electropop Godfather' with *Pop Muzik*. There's a breathing, thinking, living human behind this."

Afterwards, Scott teamed up with Ali Gavan, who runs a studio in Hove. "He's a multi-instrumentalist," Robin expands, "and great at slipping in some backing vocals or maybe a drum part, something to give it that live spirit." But it was only when Peter Stack, BMG's former head of catalogue, reached out to ask what Scott was up to that he began seeing the new recordings as an album. In fact, he may now have more than one ready. "I kept putting tracks together, and had too much material. There's 14 tracks (on *The FAQs...*), but there were many more, and at some point maybe they can be released."

As for performing, "To put a show together would not be difficult," he enthuses. "I know the characters I'd love to have. It may seem a long time coming, but I would be up for that. It'd be a very interesting journey, I bet." **Wyndham Wallace**

● ***The FAQs Of Life* is out now via BMG and reviewed on page 85**

A time to Shiiine in Minehead

Shiiine On are celebrating their 10th birthday with a star-packed event at Butlins in Minehead from 14-17 November. The headline acts are Ash (Friday), The Jesus & Mary Chain (Saturday) and Cast (Sunday).

Main Stage artists include Sleeper, Inspiral Carpets, Reef, The Bluetones, The Undertones and Jesus Jones whilst over the weekend the likes of The Soup Dragons, Space, Miles Hunt, Icicle Works, Cud, James Walsh and BMX Bandits also appear. Also playing on the dance stage will be UNKLE, DJ Yoda and Orbital's Phil Hartnoll.

For tickets, which include accommodation, scan the QR code and use promo code NCB10 for a discount.

Half-century up for The Damned

Punk heroes The Damned are marking 50 years of mayhem with a major London show.

The band, fronted by David Vanian and featuring guitarist Captain Sensible, play the OVO Arena Wembley on 11 April 2026, supported by The Loveless featuring Marc Almond, Peter Hook And The Light and The Courettes.

A band statement said: "Half a century on and who'd of thought The Damned would still be upright and breathing? We never thought we'd make it this far and neither did you..."

For tickets, visit aegpresents.co.uk/event/the-damned/.

Hats off to Montreal quartet

Men Without Hats have announced their first UK and European tour in nearly a decade.

The Montreal new wave outfit best known for their 1982 global smash *The Safety Dance* and 1987's US Top 20 hit *Pop Goes The World* will kick off their UK dates at The Old Woollen in Leeds on 21 August, followed by gigs in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Milton Keynes and London. The European tour also takes in shows in the Netherlands and Germany.

The dates coincide with promotion for the band's latest single *I Love The 80s*. A new album is also due on 15 October.

Alison Goldfrapp's second solo album, *Flux*, sees the pop auteur teaming up once more with Richard X

ALISON GOLDFRAPP

Q + A

THE SINGER-SONGWRITER IS BACK WITH *FLUX*, HER SECOND SOLO ALBUM AND FOLLOW-UP TO 2023'S *THE LOVE INVENTION*. SHE TALKS TO *CLASSIC POP* ABOUT TOURING WITH SCISSOR SISTERS, STARTING HER OWN RECORD LABEL AND THE COST OF BEING FREE.

LOIS WILSON

Born in Enfield, north London and growing up in Alton, Hampshire, Alison Goldfrapp started singing while studying fine art at Middlesex University. After graduating, she lent her vocals to records by Orbital, Dreadzone and Tricky before forming Goldfrapp, her electro synth-pop outfit with musical partner Will Gregory in 1999.

Bookended by 2000's *Felt Mountain* and 2017's *Silver Eye*, Goldfrapp released seven studio albums, including 2005's Grammy-nominated *Supernature*, which yielded the group's two UK Top 10 singles, *Ooh La La* and *Number 1*.

Going on hiatus in 2022, that same year Alison appeared on Röyksopp's album *Profound Mysteries* before unveiling her 2023 solo debut LP *The Love Invention*, which was issued on Skint and featured collaborations with Richard X among others.

She follows it next month with *Flux*, which sees her working with Richard X again along with Stefan Storm. This time, she's released it on her own label A.G. Records. "It was empowering to put it out myself," she tells *Classic Pop* from her home in London. "It feels really good."

How was the recent tour with Scissor Sisters?
We're friends, so it was really nice, and we had fun.

Those shows must have been some of the biggest you've played as a solo artist...
It was interesting, because I thought that it would feel a bit overwhelming. But actually, it felt like playing a festival in a way. It didn't feel like a completely new thing. So it all felt very doable.

How do you prepare before going on stage to perform?
Well, I definitely have to warm up my voice, for sure. I like to warm up my body as well. If there's enough time, I like to do some stretches and have 10 minutes on my own, just to get some peace. Because you're always around people, sort of 24/7 really, it's good to just have a moment in the room on my own and bring the adrenaline down a little bit – if that's possible. I like the room to smell really nice. I quite often burn some essential oils in my oil burner.

"FLUX IS A VERY STRONG WORD. I LOVE THE WAY IT LOOKS AND I LOVE THE WAY IT SOUNDS. IT'S A VERY GRAPHIC WORD."

The new album is called *Flux*. It's an incredibly powerful title. Where does it stem from?
It stems from lots of things, really. I think as humans, as a society, we're sort of constantly in flux. It's a very strong word. I love the way it looks and I love the way it sounds. It's a very graphic word. It has lots of dual meanings. It's also a word that I got to know when I was at art school. There was an art movement [Fluxus, founded by George Maciunas] that loved that word. The word certainly holds a lot of meaning for me. As a woman in my 50s, I've gone through many personal and physical changes in recent years. For me, it's about embracing change and evolving – feeling good about change, and things never being the same.

The first song that you wrote for the album was *Sound & Light*. Was it planned at that time for an album?
The idea was to write some tunes. At that stage, I didn't know whether it was going to be an album or an EP.

And what inspired it?
It was inspired by the Northern Lights but I hadn't seen them at that point. It was more of a fantasy. I'd just gone through a huge shift in my personal life and was desperate for freedom – wanting to be out, running wild in nature, under a vast sky on a snowy vista. I've always wanted to see the Northern Lights and have gone to so many different places in a quest to watch them. And then, lo and behold, when I went back to Sweden after we finished the song, they appeared for the first time ever in my life. It felt like making that tune had summoned them. It was a dream come true.

Is there a writing process?
There is no one [process]. It's just a case of things evolving. You make sounds, you play around, you improvise, and things evolve out of that. That is the process. I have a notebook. I think about lyrics, but it all feeds into each other. It's very hard to pinpoint one thing, because it's many things.

What was it like recording the album in Stockholm?
It was lovely. I love Sweden, I've been there a few times. I also did some

recording here in London. It was a mixture of the two, actually, and I also did some at home.

Was there a brief for how you wanted it to sound?
The Love Invention was focused on dance beats and had less obvious song structures, whereas with this album, I wanted to focus more on the songs.

Lyrically it's very interesting. Like on the track *Cinnamon Light* you sing, "Are we free or lonely now?" which could be both personal and/or a state of the nation address.
I love that you pick that lyric out because yes, it's sort of both personal and global, really, in that, what does freedom actually mean? You know, this idea that we are tuned into everything, we have so much information at hand, and yet we can feel incredibly isolated at the same time. And what cost is freedom? What does it mean, really? It's so huge, it's almost overwhelming to think about it in a way.

With a track like *Hey Hi Hello,* which feels more personal, do you feel vulnerable when you write so honestly?
Sometimes. Certain songs feel more directly personal than others. I think that's the difference between this album and *The Love Invention*. This one feels a little bit more personal in terms of lyrics. I guess that's why I wanted to focus more on songs.

Was it hard to make that first step as a solo artist with *The Love Invention*?
Yeah, it was a bit daunting, but I'd wanted to do something entirely different for quite a long time. I didn't ever have the confidence to do that before. It's funny, because lockdown forced that, in a way. It was the first time that I'd been on my own for any length of time, and I was forced to get set up at home and start doing things there. I was like, 'oh, wow, okay, I can actually be more independent'. It allowed some space to investigate in a way that hadn't been quite the same as before. The first thing I did was with Röyksopp, and I was thinking, 'Great, I can go to Norway and hang out there'. And they were like, 'No, you can't come over'. I was going to have to work out how to do it here. That was the start of it, and it turned out to be really fun and cool. I just went with it, and it grew out of that.

Are Goldfrapp on hiatus or is that it?
I feel like nothing's black and white. I don't feel like it has to be one or the other. We'd come to the end of our contract with Mute so that was a sort of natural ending. Will has always done other projects. I've often gone on tour whilst he's doing other things, and we've always had quite a separate way of being. It naturally came out of that. Then I felt like I needed a bit of distance to address what I wanted to do next. I was just exploring other areas of creativity, visual things. But I never say never. I mean, I'm still in touch with Will, but at this point, I'm enjoying exploring and working with other people doing different kinds of things.

Alison Goldfrapp has set up her own label, A.G. Records, to release *Flux*

The 11-track album *Flux* also sees Alison working with co-producer Stefan Storm

You set up your own label A.G. Records to release *Flux*. What was the motivation behind doing that and how easy was it for you to create the label?
It's very easy to set up, but it was also a little bit terrifying because it had a lot of financial implications. I had to do a lot of checking with accountants and my management to work out whether it was feasible. My motivation was to own my own songs and be independent. In that respect, it's been really empowering, and I'm very pleased to have done it. I'm not going to be signing any other people as I can't afford to do that, but it would have been a lovely idea.

● ***Flux* is released via A.G. Records on 15 August and reviewed on page 82**

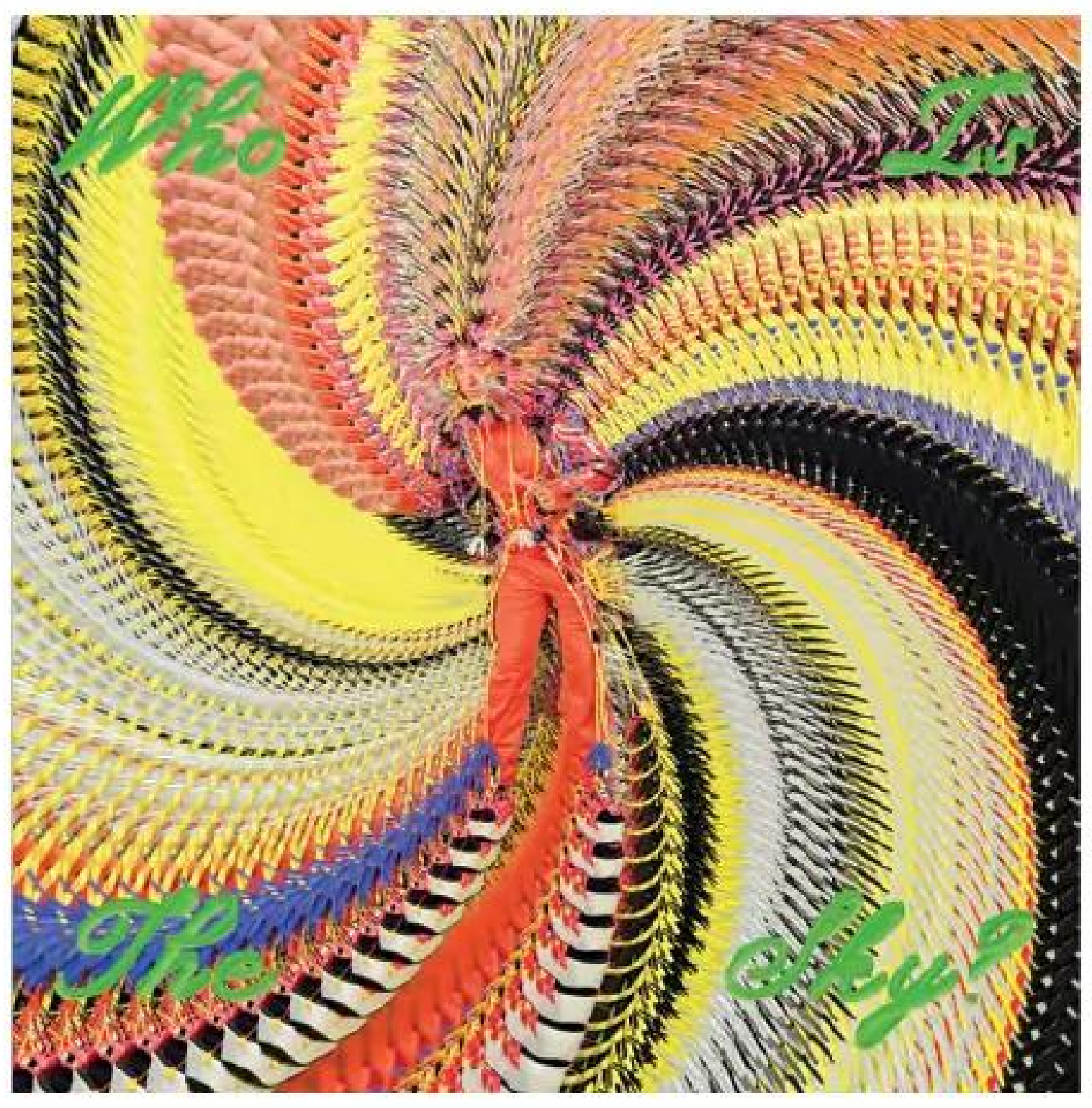
DAVID BYRNE REVEALS NEW SOLO ALBUM AND TOUR

***Who Is The Sky?* features guest vocals from St. Vincent and Paramore's Hayley Williams**

© Shervin Lainez

David Byrne has announced his first solo album in seven years, *Who Is The Sky?*.

Produced by the Grammy-winning Kid Harpoon (Harry Styles, Miley Cyrus), ideas for *Who Is The Sky?* began to form in 2023 after Byrne's *American Utopia* era came to a close. The pop maverick invited an array of guests to flesh out the tracks including St. Vincent, Paramore's Hayley Williams, The Smile drummer Tom Skinner and percussionist Mauro Refosco.

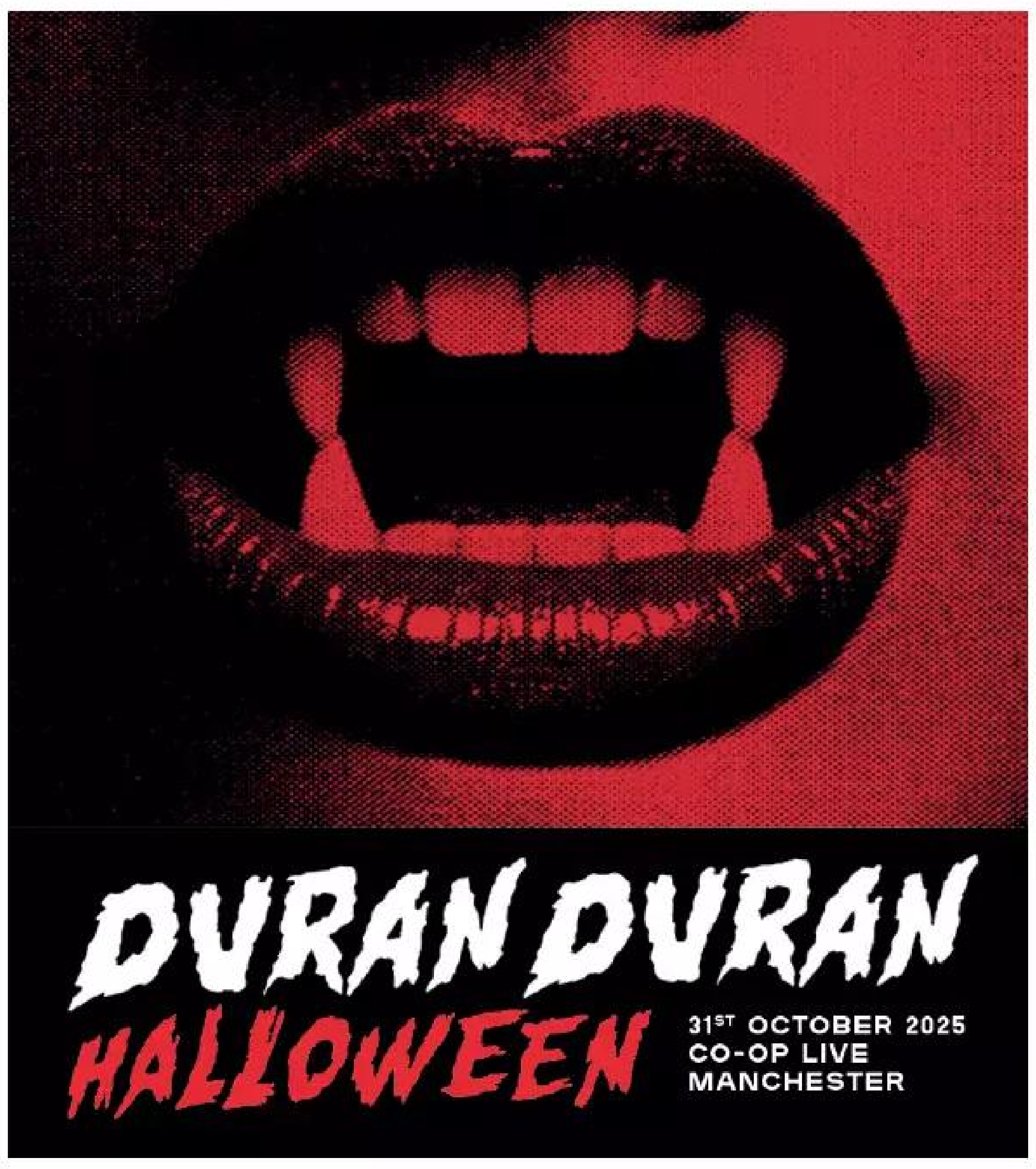


"At my age, at least for me, there's a 'don't give a shit about what people think' attitude that kicks in," Byrne said. "I can step outside my comfort zone with the knowledge that I kind of know who I am by now and sort of know what I'm doing. That said, every new set of songs, every song even, is a new adventure. There's always a bit of, 'how do I work this?'

"I've found that not every collaboration works, but often when they do, it's because I'm able to clearly impart what it is I'm trying to do. They hopefully get that, and as a result, we're now joined together heading to the same unknown place."

Byrne also revealed that he will return to the road with a new live tour. The UK leg opens at Cardiff's Utilita Arena on 2 March 2026 and takes in London (Eventim Apollo, 3-4 March), Glasgow (SEC Armadillo, 6-7 March) and Manchester (O2 Apollo 9-10 March) before returning to London's Eventim Apollo on 15-16 March. For more details, visit whoisthesky.davidbyrne.com/tour/.

- ***Who Is The Sky?* is released on 5 September and will be reviewed in the next issue**



DURAN DURAN BRING GHOULISH DELIGHTS TO MANCHESTER

Duran Duran are bringing their Danse Macabre Halloween Party to the UK for the first time this year after previous sold-out shows in Las Vegas and Madison Square Garden.

Speaking ahead of the gig at the Co-op Live in Manchester on 31 October, keyboardist Nick Rhodes said: "It will be a unique, themed show unlike any of our other performances, overflowing with shocks and surprises – so even we do not know what may happen on the night."

Fans can expect a one-night-only exclusive Halloween set filled with the essential hits, alongside rarely played songs from the Duran Duran crypt.

The band are currently touring their live show in stadiums and arenas across Europe after a major appearance at the 75th annual Sanremo Music Festival – a full circle moment 40 years after their debut there in 1985. Taking time out from their busy live schedule, Duran Duran have also been in the studio together this year working on new material – most recently with Nile Rodgers at Abbey Road in London. For more details, visit duranduran.com.

© Cecily Eno

BRIAN ENO AND BEATIE WOLFE PLAY THEIR CARDS RIGHT

Brian Eno and Beatie Wolfe have unveiled a pair of collaborative albums at the producer's London studio. In a launch party Q&A on 4 June hosted by Grayson Haver Currin, Eno and Wolfe discussed the making of the 11-track *Luminal*, which features Wolfe on vocals, with eight-track companion album *Lateral* a wholly instrumental ambient affair.

Talking at the event, Eno explained how the plan was to deliberately keep the collaboration stripped-back: "[We used] a very spartan line-up of instruments. It was just the two of us with one electric guitar, we added another one right at the end [of the sessions]. The guitar strings have been changed once in 40 years – 10 years ago – so they were relatively fresh [laughs]."

A continual touchstone in his career, Eno employed his Oblique Strategies cards to keep recording sessions unpredictable. The producer explained: "We used the cards quite a lot and would each pull one out [of the deck] and not reveal to the other person what it said. We'd then operate under the restrictions that the card gave us to try to bend the sessions so it made the card work. It produced some interesting results. If Beatie has a card that says 'destroy everything' and I have one that says 'change nothing and continue with immaculate consistency' then you've got two people who are working at cross purposes, which sometimes produces good results."

BEATIE WOLFE & BRIAN ENO
LUMINAL

BRIAN ENO & BEATIE WOLFE
LATERAL

Central to the collaboration was that the music was an exploration of the concept of 'feeling'.

Eno reflected: "You'd think that the first question people ask themselves when they're making pieces of music in studios would be 'Am I getting any feeling from this?' If we weren't getting a feeling from something, we moved on.

"This studio is essentially a play space for grown-ups. I have this sentence in my book [*What Art Does*] which says, 'Play is how children learn, art is how adults play'. And this is an adult playroom. It's lovely, and I'm very lucky to have it."

● ***Luminal*** **and** ***Lateral*** **are out now and reviewed on page 84**

Fratellis hit the road to celebrate debut LP

Scottish indie outfit The Fratellis have announced a 12-date UK tour for February 2026 to mark the 20th anniversary of their debut album *Costello Music*. Kicking off in Nottingham on 5 February, further dates include Cardiff, London, Liverpool and Manchester before finally wrapping up in Newcastle on 20 February.

The band are also making a variety of festival appearances this summer.

Visit the *Classic Pop* website at classicpopmag.com/reviews/live-reviews/bristol-sounds-review/ to read more about the band's recent concert at the Bristol Sounds event on 28 June.

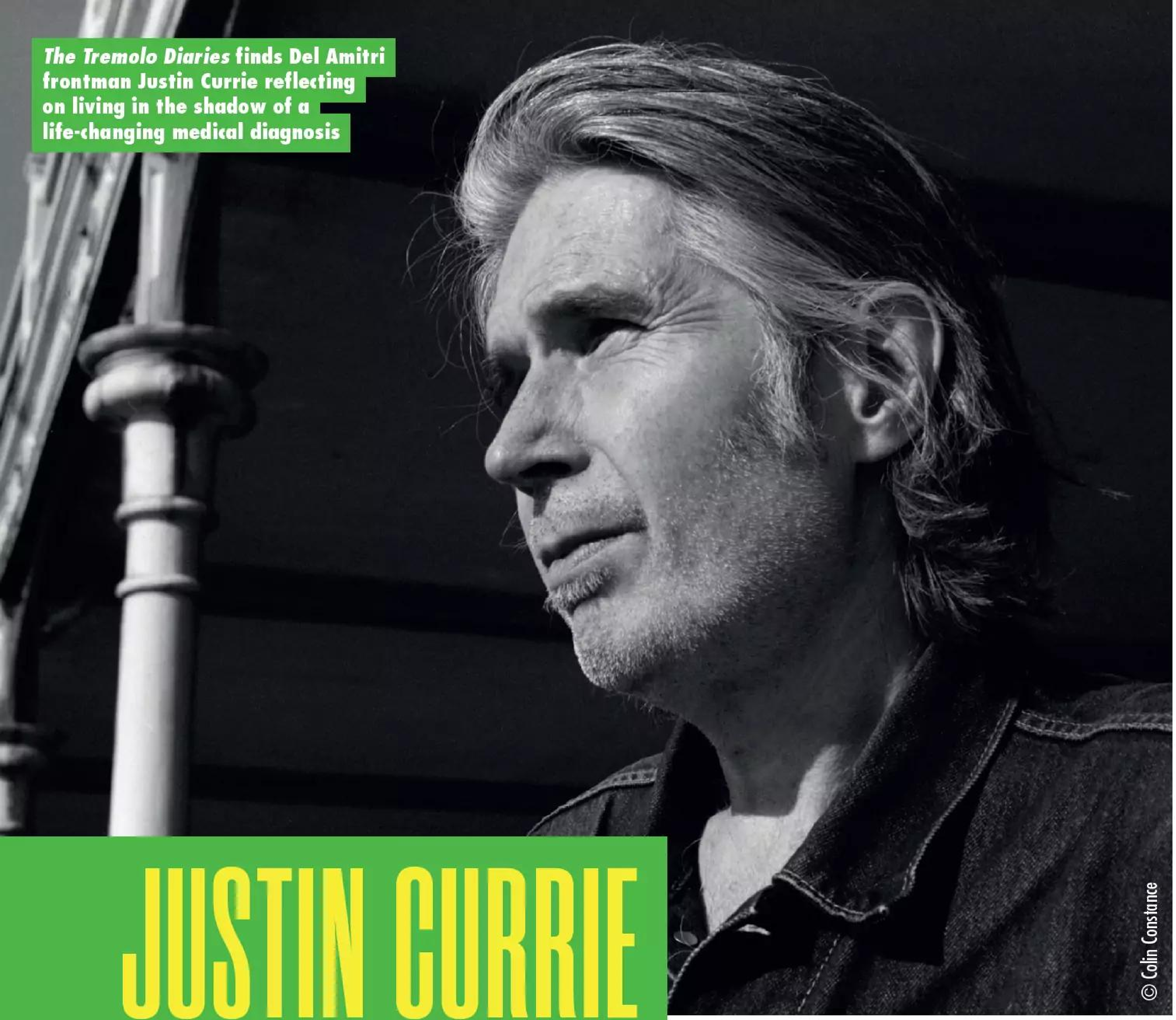
1 HIT WONDER

the maisonettes
HEARTACHE AVENUE
stereo

HEARTACHE AVENUE
THE MAISONETTES

After the demise of prog-pop band City Boy at the end of the 70s, lead singer Lol Mason took a much more soulful direction with his next project. The Maisonettes, a three-piece also featuring keyboard player Mark Tibenham and drummer Nick Parry, combined an of-its-time electronic sound with a heavy reliance on the rhythms and backing vocal stylings of American singing groups of the 60s, showcased impeccably by one huge single on indie label Ready Steady Go! which hit the Top 10 in 1983. Essentially a rewrite of *Heartbreak Hotel*, with a lyric of loneliness following a failed relationship, *Heartache Avenue* was nonetheless instant, upbeat and immediately singable. Radio playlists found it too irresistible to turn down. Backing singers Sue Smythe, Kim Pickett and Cathy Evans maintained an infectious hook over Mason's beseeching lead as he took the Elvis Presley metaphor of living on Lonely Street on a trip to another part of town. The song hit the Top 40 in Christmas week of 1982 and got a fortuitous opening slot on *Top Of The Pops*, enabling a festive rush on sales that culminated in a fortnight at No.7 in January 1983 and another *TOTP* appearance. Follow-up *Where I Stand* reached No.80; the album, *Maisonettes For Sale*, didn't chart and the band split up in 1984. Lol Mason died in 2019, aged 69.

MATTHEW RUDD IS THE HOST OF FORGOTTEN 80s ON ABSOLUTE 80s



***The Tremolo Diaries* finds Del Amitri frontman Justin Currie reflecting on living in the shadow of a life-changing medical diagnosis**

© Colin Constance

JUSTIN CURRIE

A PARKINSON'S DIAGNOSIS IS JUST ONE OF THE SLINGS AND ARROWS LIFE HAS HURLED AT THE DEL AMITRI FRONTMAN RECENTLY. BUT HE AND THE BAND ARE PLAYING ON – AND NOW HE'S WRITTEN ONE OF THE YEAR'S MOST EXTRAORDINARY MUSIC MEMOIRS.

PAUL KIRKLEY

Justin Currie considers himself a lucky man. "I've been incredibly fortunate not to have a boss for 40 years," grins the amiable singer-songwriter, whose band Del Amitri began life in Glasgow as spiky indie scenesters, before adopting a rootsy American rock sound (with facial hair to match) on evergreen hits like *Nothing Ever Happens*, *Always The Last To Know* and US radio smash *Roll To Me*.

But the years since Del Amitri's 2021 comeback LP, *Fatal Mistakes*, have not been kind to the frontman, whose diagnosis with Parkinson's coincided with the death of his mother and a debilitating stroke suffered by his partner of more than 20 years.

His book *The Tremolo Diaries: Life On The Road And Other Diseases* is a series of on-tour dispatches, written during "an arduous trek through the circus sheds of America" as bottom-of-the-bill support to Barenaked Ladies and, later, on a European tour with Simple Minds. Candid, often dark and sometimes savagely funny, it's as beautifully written as you'd expect from one of our finest rock poets. (Though try telling him that...)

Q + A

One striking thing about *The Tremolo Diaries* is how bracingly honest it is. You don't attempt to sugar-coat things, or impose a redemption arc. Because that's not how life works, is it?
It's certainly not how a degenerative brain disease works. A lot of the time when I'm trying to be funny about the disease, it's because I'm trying to keep other people cheerful. Sometimes, late at night with my friends, I'll just go: 'This is shit'. And there's a bit of that in the book. But I didn't want it to be too bleak. Because sometimes it *is* fucking bleak.

You first got an inkling that something might be wrong playing *Nothing Ever Happens*...
Yeah. Suddenly I found my plectrum was getting stuck in the strings. I thought: that's a bit weird. It was definitely good for flagging it up early. The neurologist said, 'If you didn't play the guitar, I wouldn't have seen you for another five years'.

You find touring a strain, but you also admit "playing shows is all I have left".
Even without an illness, touring is not reality. You're living in a kind of infantilised fantasy world. Everything is laid on for you, and the more you do it, the more difficult you find that depressurisation at the end. Everybody I know at my age gets pretty depressed when they come off the road. And especially with Parkinson's – because I'm scared I'll never do it again.

The road is an escape from the difficult situation at home – but one you also feel guilty about...
The great thing about being away is you're not always dwelling on that stuff. But when you do, the guilt is not great. But hey, feeling guilty is better than having a stroke and needing 24-hour care, that's for sure.

You don't pull any punches in the book, railing against bad food, awful towns, dreadful people – and even some artists you're sharing a bill with. Are you past caring about causing offence?
I was a bit worried, and I considered taking some of it out, for diplomatic reasons. But then I thought: fuck it. If I think something's horrible, I'm allowed to say it's horrible. It's not like I'm trying to get on the Radio One playlist – I'm not going to blow up my career. I don't really have a career. I've had one, and that was great. And now I can say what the fuck I want.

Your lyrics have always been fairly acidic. Do you think that might get overlooked, because they're dressed in such hummable tunes?
I'm not sure many people pay attention to lyrics. So yeah, if something quite bitter is cloaked in a sweet melody or a pretty chord change, no-one's going to notice.

You say that, somewhat late in the day, you've started caring about your reputation. Why do you think that might be?
I wouldn't even want to speculate. I've always assumed, once you get a bit of popular exposure, that half the people think you're a total c***. And that's fine. You don't worry about that, because there are other people who really love your music. I've always been aware that I can come across as a bit of a wanker, but it's only recently I've started worrying about it.

You're a very harsh self-critic. In the book, you call yourself a mediocrity, a limp imitator, an end-of-the-pier act. And I don't think that's false modesty – I think you genuinely don't appreciate how good you are.
I know what rung of the ladder, in terms of cultural importance, Del Amitri are on. And I've always been happy with that. Success is a clumsy word, but we had a bit of success, we made a bit of money.

“PEOPLE WILL CROSS THE STREET TO SAY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS ABOUT SONGS I’VE WRITTEN, AND THAT GENUINELY FILLS ME UP WITH GLEE”

We got by on our own terms, and never got sucked into any tabloid shit. It was the best of all possible worlds. Would I listen to Del Amitri records, if I wasn’t in Del Amitri? That’s a question I’ve never really been able to answer. Sometimes I listen to those records and go, ‘God, that’s a fucking good song’. And at other times I think I might hate this if it wasn’t me doing it. But look, people will cross the street to say the most beautiful things to me about songs I’ve written, and that genuinely fills me up with glee. I’m not so self-deprecating that I think they’re wrong, or idiots.

The second half of the book sees you touring Europe with Simple Minds – a band that meant a lot to you as a teenager.

I adored *Empires And Dance*, because it sounded like the future, and they suddenly made Glasgow seem so modern, in a really cool way. But also the fact they went global was really inspiring. They made everything seem possible.

You say it was always the future that excited you. How do you see your future now?

When your future is suddenly in grave doubt, you learn to adapt. The first thing you do is cancel any idea of having an old age that’s pleasant. And then you just have to try to limit yourself to the present day. I see a neurologist once a year, and he says the Parky’s is progressing very slowly, so that’s good. On stage, we’ve got around the problem by rearranging things, or getting other people to play my bits. As long as I can sing, I can just about get away with it. But there’ll come a point where it’s embarrassing.

You’ve been working on new songs – for a Del Amitri album?

I get offered solo things, but I need the support of the band around me these days. We’ve been reticent about making another album, partly for financial reasons – naively, we were slightly shocked at how little money we made back on our last record. But it’s inevitable we’ll make another one now, because the songs are there, and they will insist on being released.

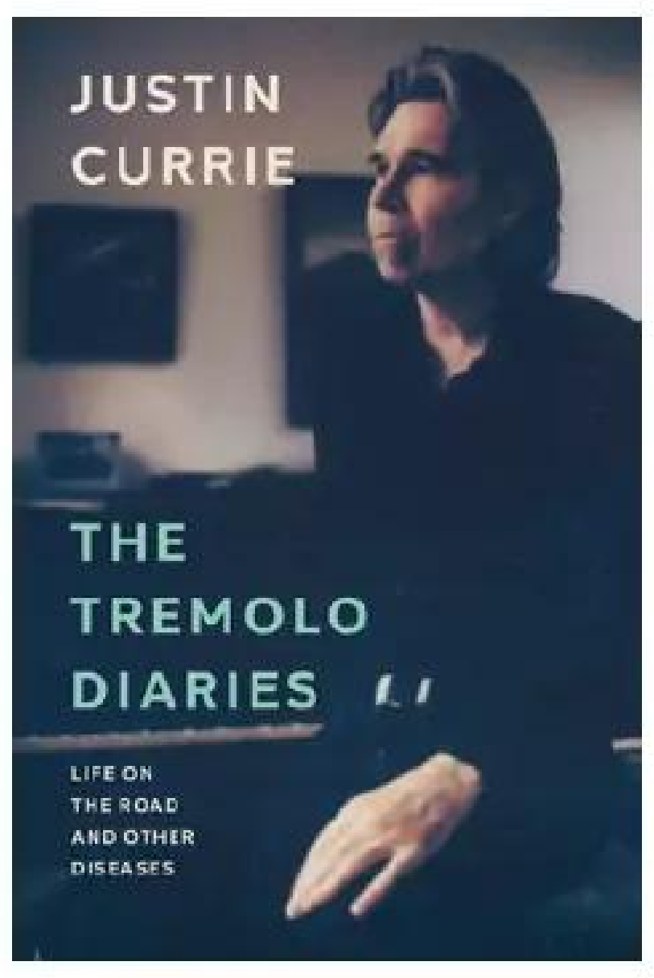
What can you tell us about the new songs?

I’ve mostly been writing about the sad shit that’s been going on recently, after my girlfriend had this appalling stroke at the end of 2022. At first I thought it was unreleasable – I was scared of it. But now I’ve gone the other way. I think it’s the best thing I’ve ever done. As much as I hate the idea of songwriting being therapeutic, it has been quite therapeutic.

Above: Del Amitri pictured in 1990, the year of their first hit, *Nothing Ever Happens*

Your songs have always been brutally cynical about love – but in the book, you write: ‘So much has been taken away. Except for love. Love is here to stay. Love can keep me alive.’ Is *that* the redemption arc: that you finally believe in the power of love?

Yeah. I think when something bad happens to the one person you’ve loved more than anybody else in your life, you’re left dealing with the question of what love is. And that’s really surprised me, because I’m pretty cynical and scientific about these things. I regard all human culture as just an attempt to mate. And I’ve not really changed on that, but… I hate the word magical, but there are overwhelming feelings that only love can engender. And that has been astonishing to me. It’s like grief: grief is more than pain, it is almost a celebration of how much somebody was loved. And the more we go through life, the more we lose friends, lovers, family members… I don’t think you get more sentimental as you get older. I think you just really appreciate what love is. 🟥



Justin Currie used his tour journals as the starting point for *The Tremolo Diaries*

● *The Tremolo Diaries* is published on 28 August by New Modern and reviewed on page 97

LOST & FOUND

eighth wonder
FEARLESS

FEARLESS
EIGHTH WONDER

By the time an 18-year-old Patsy Kensit landed her breakthrough role in *Absolute Beginners* in 1986 – veering herself straight on to Fleet Street's radars – she was already heavily involved in recording an album with Eighth Wonder, the electropop group formed with her brother Jamie three years earlier. The coquettish, Clare Grogan-esque vocal Patsy showcases throughout *Fearless* never tires or grates, and is particularly effective on the band's interpretation of discarded Pet Shop Boys track *I'm Not Scared* ("If I was you, I wouldn't treat me the way you do" is one of Neil Tennant's great lines), which they took into the Top 10. The other major UK hit, *Cross My Heart*, feels lightweight compared to further efforts here, such as the lively, sequenced *When The Phone Stops Ringing* (co-written by Bernie Taupin) and *Wild Love*, backed by smart programmed drums and pleasant harmonies. *Anything At All* has a killer chorus and a great guitar solo, while on closing ballad *The Dress*, the effects are notably reduced on Kensit's mic, allowing her an opportunity to prove her worth as a singer. Sadly, Eighth Wonder were seldom considered part of the cool, streetwise, female-led 'blonde-pop' groups prevalent at the time, due to an unfair perception Kensit couldn't be taken seriously as a 'proper' vocalist. *Fearless* reached No.47 in the UK Albums Chart in 1988 and the group split the following year.

MATTHEW RUDD

© Joseph Cultice Bye
AUGUST 2025
CLASSIC POP
BEST NEW RELEASE

STOP PRESS

GARY NUMAN
A PERFECT CIRCLE: LIVE

BMG

★★★★½

CONCERT FOOTAGE DOCUMENTS THE LEGEND'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO HIGH-PROFILE LONDON VENUE

"It's taken a very long time to get back here," announces Gary Numan halfway through his return to Wembley Arena. Much had happened in the 41 years since Numan stated that he was retiring at the end of his previous Wembley show in 1981. For Numan, that included learning to enjoy playing live: *A Perfect Circle*'s title is derived from him finally taking on Wembley on his own terms.

Part of the crowd's fervour is because this 3LP/2CD+Blu-Ray was filmed at a show in 2022, when fans were celebrating going to gigs again post-lockdown. But 95% of the party mood is that it's impossible not to get swept up in Numan's enthusiasm.

His music's grandiose scope was made for bigger stages, with Numan and his band delivering a performance to match. They do everything they can to ensure the message of songs like *My Name Is Ruin* hits home, creating a friendly competition with the audience to see who's having the most fun.

Of the guests, Gazelle Twin's black veil perfectly fits the mood of *The Gift* in an opening half-hour where a pouting *Metal* is a highlight. *Is This World Not Enough* is chilling, even if it's undercut by Numan joking "Go to your room!" as he introduces daughters Persia and Raven's noirish backing vocals.

Chants of "Nuuuuman!" grow ever louder as their recipient gets ever more theatrical, topped off by jumping on top of the keyboard stand in a straight-up pop whirlwind version of *Cars*. It's effectively a Best Of show, playing songs as you'd hope to hear them, whether vamping up *Down In The Park* or going for the jugular on *Ghost Nation*.

The warmth is typified by Numan introducing Wembley '81 bandmates Russell Bell and Chris Payne for *M.E.*, only to mess up that Basement Jaxx-sampled intro. The singer creases up, sighing: "I've only played that song for 41 fucking years." When the band goes again, *M.E.* is magnificent.

Sensibly letting the performance carry the visuals, here's Numan relishing his second chance. He's since begun revisiting his catalogue and is about to tour *Telekon* in full. How he channels all this – whisper it – happiness should make for a fascinating next album. **John Earls**

GARY NUMAN
A PERFECT CIRCLE: LIVE

GARY NUMAN

TELEKON

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PERFORMING THE CLASSIC ALBUM & HIS GREATEST HITS

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Nov 12	Newcastle O2 City Hall
Nov 14	Leeds O2 Academy
Nov 15	Birmingham O2 Academy
Nov 16	Bristol Beacon
Nov 18	Cardiff Uni Great Hall
Nov 19	Bournemouth O2 Academy
Nov 21	London Eventim Apollo
Nov 22	Brighton Centre
Nov 23	Southend Cliffs Pavilion
Nov 25	Nottingham Rock City
Nov 26	Cambridge Corn Exchange
Nov 27	Norwich UEA
Nov 29	Manchester O2 Apollo
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45

An SJM Concerts presentation by arrangement with Wasserman

Ian Peel's A to Z of POP

BEFORE WHAM! THERE WAS THE EXECUTIVE. BEFORE TEARS FOR FEARS, GRADUATE. AND DURING THE EARLY- TO MID-80s POP BOOM, BOTH WORLDS COLLIDED IN THE SAME RECORD SHOPS AT THE SAME TIME.

F IS FOR... THE FORERUNNERS

There's a misconception that 80s pop was full of legends born overnight. But if you were in a record shop in the early part of the decade, you'd see it being regularly, hastily restocked with releases from the forerunners that came before the decade's biggest groups.

I recently read Andrew Ridgeley's absorbing autobiography, *Wham!, George & Me*. He spends what feels like half the book fondly reminiscing about The Executive, the ska band that he and George Michael formed before Wham! Their demos, rehearsals, gigs and line-up changes are noted in surprising detail. All of which proves that Wham!'s jump into fame was only partly about that last-minute *Top Of The Pops* booking to perform *Young Guns (Go For It)*. It was as much about the time spent honing their craft and the forerunner that was The Executive.

Another unsuccessful, forgotten but equally important forerunner is Graduate. Formed in Bath in 1978, this was the group in which Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith formulated their ideas and attitudes towards pop prior to forming Tears For Fears. They had more success than The Executive, releasing a few singles and an album on Pye Records. But it wasn't destined to last, not least because their mod revival look and sound was about to be, thankfully, washed away by synth-pop, new wave and New Pop.

Fast forward to 1986 and Tears For Fears are at their absolute peak. *Everybody Wants To Rule The World* is a global hit. But, if you'd bought that already and wanted more, Pye – by then rebranded as PRT (Precision Records and Tapes) – spotted an opportunity and reissued Graduate's album, *Acting My Age*. On 10-inch single at that, the favoured limited edition format of *Big Chair*-era TFF, and prominently stickered to proclaim, "Featuring Curt Smith and Roland Orzabal." Those 10-inches were everywhere in 1986.

It was just like in 1980 when a reissued *Young Parisians* became a UK Top 10 hit for Adam And The Ants on the back of *Antmusic*. And in 1982 when *Deutscher Girls* was reissued – much to Adam's annoyance – and reached the Top 20 on the back of the *Prince Charming* campaign. Or while, in 1981, Ultravox were busy in the studio creating the follow-up to *Vienna* and Island Records made sure their pre-breakthrough 1978 LP *Systems Of Romance* was in shops everywhere as a reissue.

How did this happen? Firstly, in the very early 80s, the indie label ecosystem was springing up and it was easier than ever for the likes of a nascent Adam And The Ants to get a record deal. Secondly, massive demand. When The Ants hit it big you could buy an album, and you could pick up whatever single was currently out. But, apart from an unofficial poster magazine, that was it. We were a long way off the era of the online merch store, but people wanted more. And the labels were only too happy to oblige, to cash in and quickly reissue material from the forerunners to the biggest groups of the day that they had in their archives.

> PEOPLE WANTED MORE AND THE INDIE LABELS WERE ONLY TOO HAPPY TO OBLIGE, TO CASH IN AND REISSUE MATERIAL FROM THE FORERUNNERS TO THE BIGGEST GROUPS OF THE DAY THAT THEY HAD IN THEIR ARCHIVES

But don't get me wrong, nothing about all this was a bad thing, unless you were the artist in question intently focused on the present and the future. For everyone else, we got to see and hear what life was like for the forerunners, before they had the chance to *Make It Big*. ■

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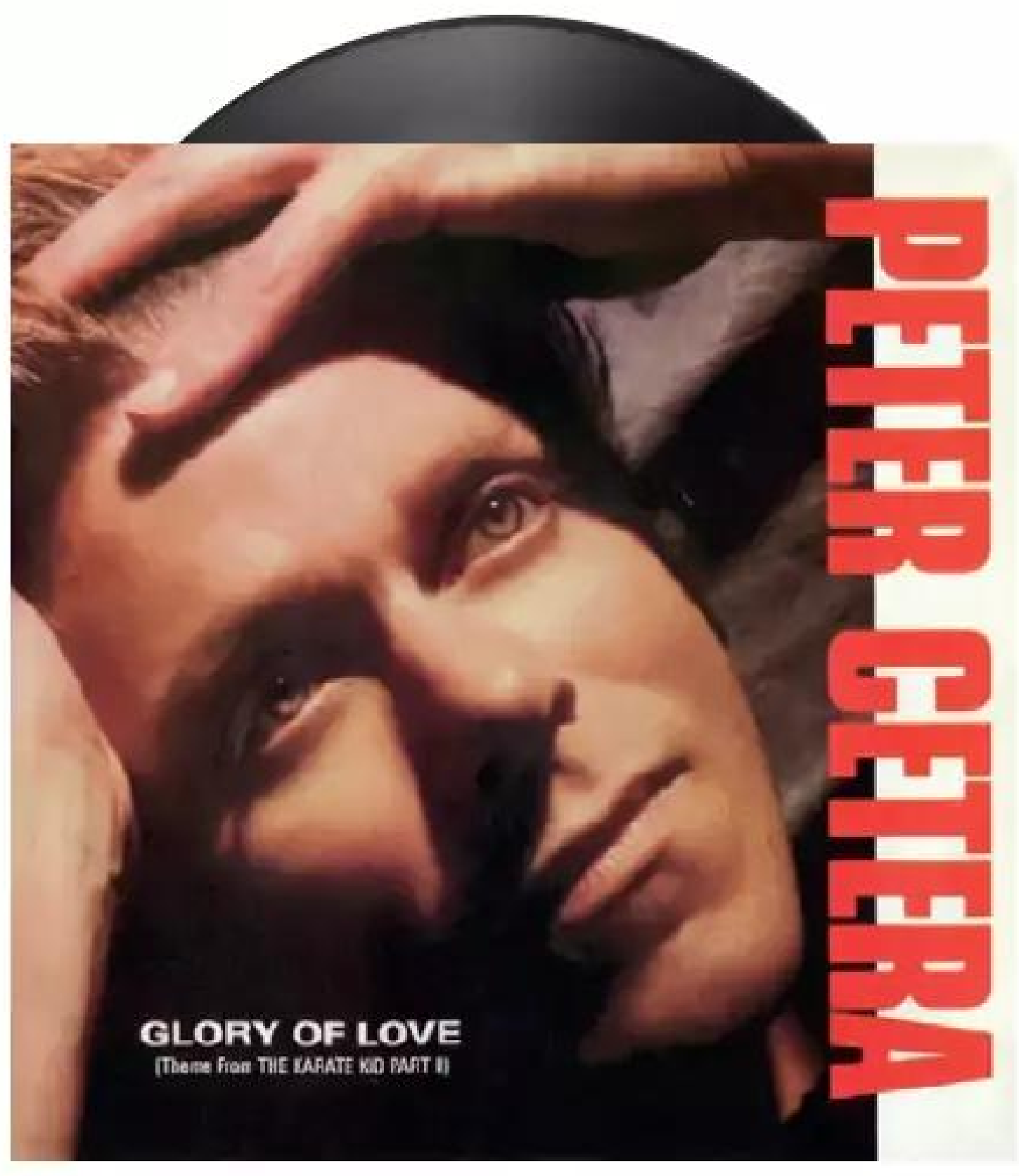
This month in POP

AUGUST 1986

NUMAN'S FANS TAKE A STAND, MADONNA PREACHES TO THE CONVERTED AND SLIPPERY CUSTOMERS BON JOVI RELEASE THEIR BREAKTHROUGH ALBUM

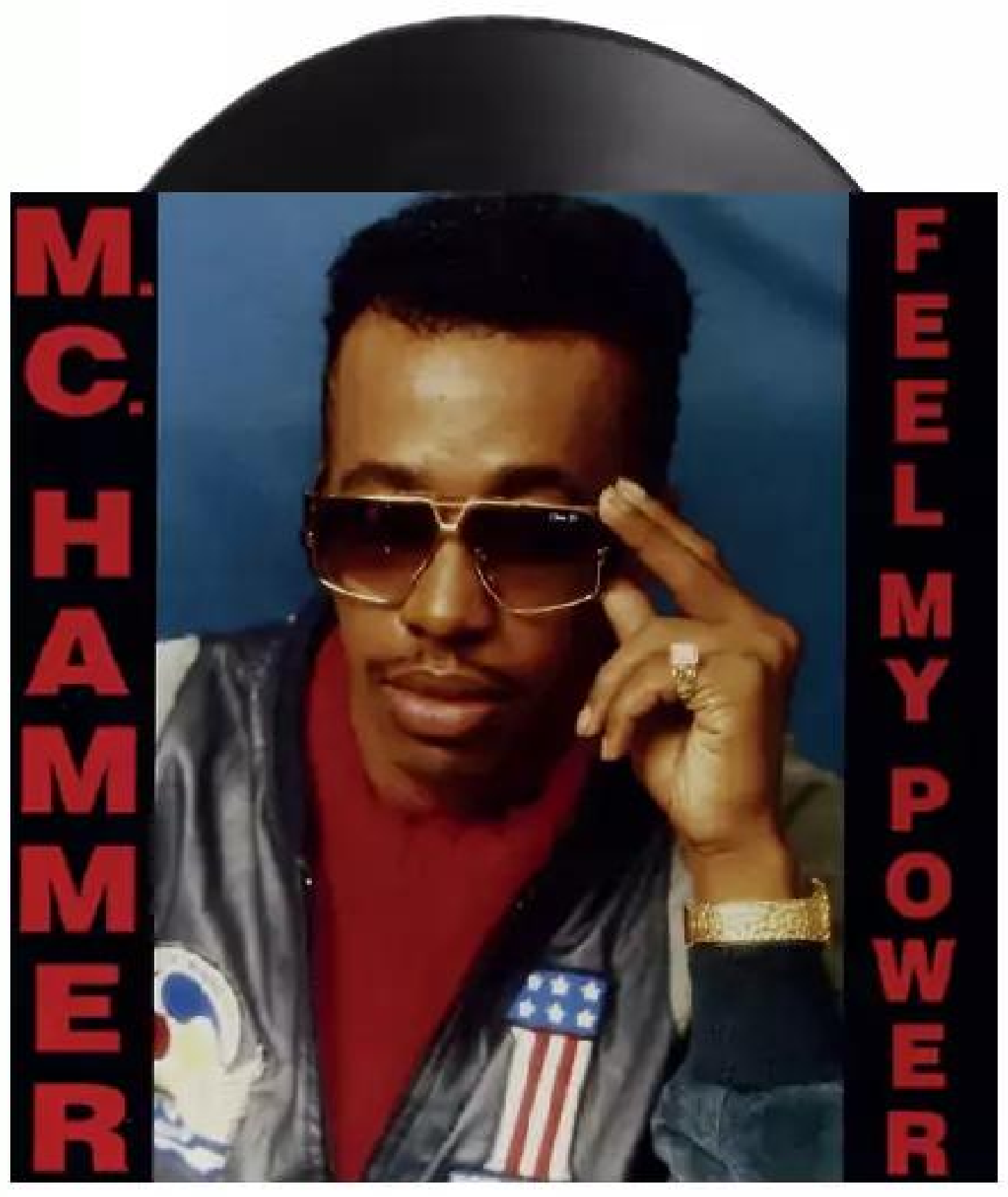
STEVE O'BRIEN



02 Peter Cetera, former vocalist and bassist with Chicago, starts a two-week run at No.1 on the US Singles Chart with *The Glory Of Love*, taken from the martial arts movie *The Karate Kid Part II*.

09 Hundreds of Gary Numan fans picket BBC Radio 1, demanding the star receive more airtime. Recent singles, *This Is Love* and *I Can't Stop*, had peaked at No.28 and No.27.

13 Four years before his first hit, the rapper MC Hammer releases his non-charting debut album, *Feel My Power*.



ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

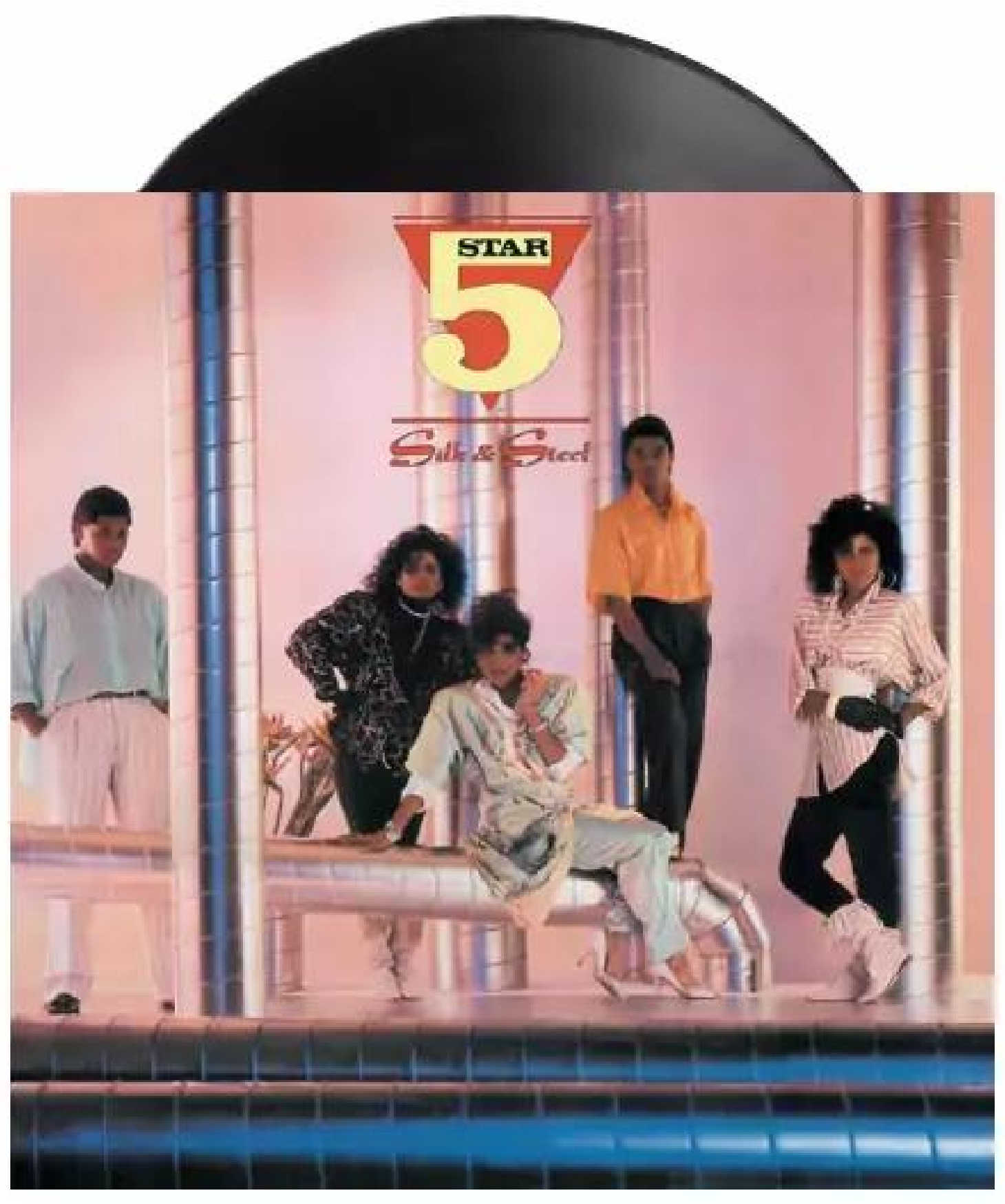
16 **Madonna hits No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100 with *Papa Don't Preach*, her fourth US chart-topper.**

MADONNA
papa don't preach

16 Rick Allen, drummer with Def Leppard, makes his first appearance with the band at the Monsters Of Rock Festival in Castle Donington, after losing his left arm in a car accident.

18 Bon Jovi release their third studio album, *Slippery When Wet*. The long-player features the hit singles *You Give Love A Bad Name*, *Livin' On A Prayer* and *Wanted Dead Or Alive*.

18 Five Star release their second long-player, *Silk & Steel*, an eventual No. 1 hit in the UK.

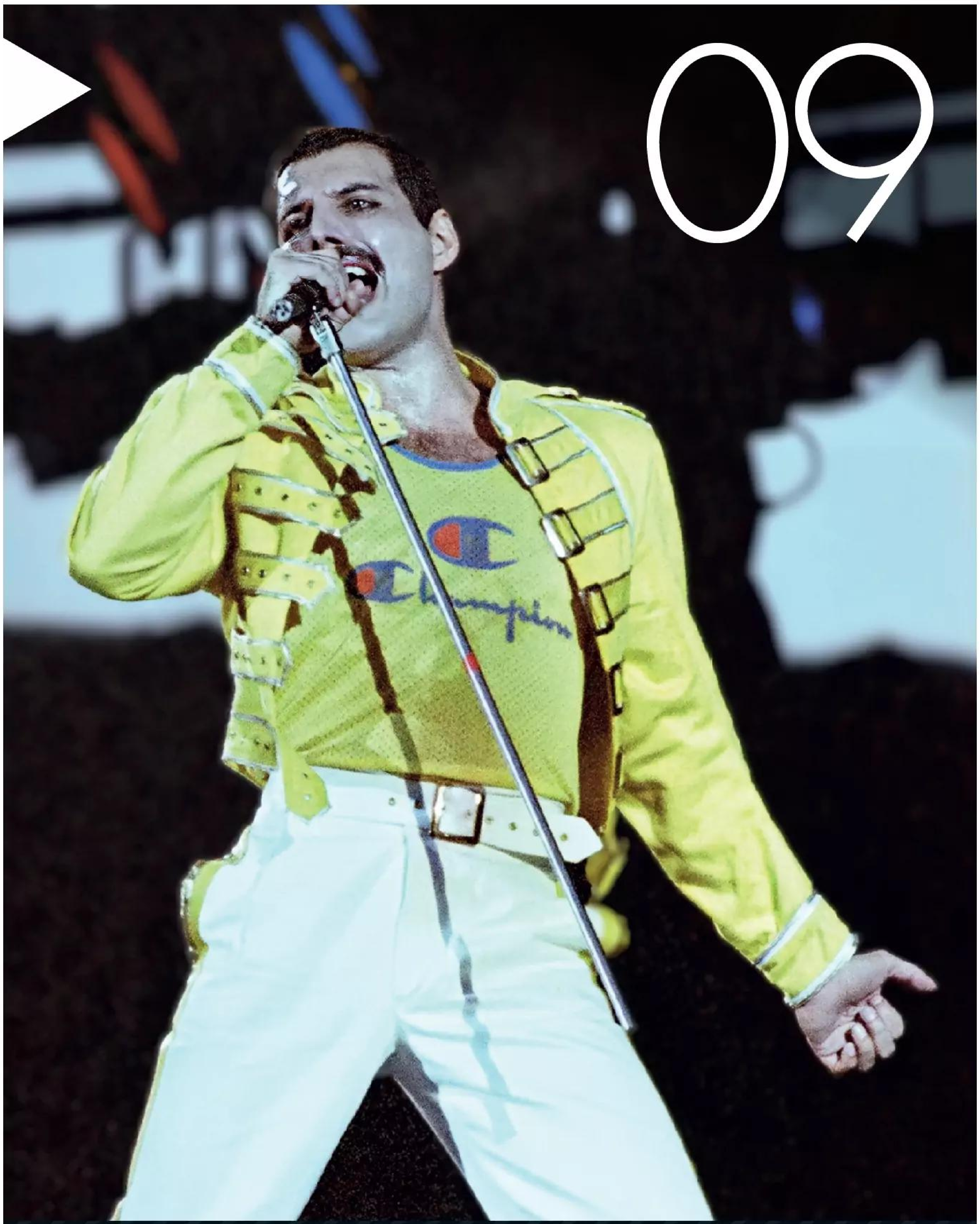


23 Boris Gardiner starts a three-week run at No.1 on the UK Singles Chart with *I Wanna Wake Up With You*. His time at the top is eventually ended by the Communards' *Don't Leave Me This Way*.

28 A few days before her autobiography, *I, Tina*, hits US bookstores, 46-year-old Tina Turner is presented with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

31 Boomtown Rats' singer Bob Geldof marries television presenter Paula Yates in Las Vegas. Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon is in attendance, serving as Bob's best man.

09



Two months on from the start of their Magic Tour, Queen played to more than 120,000 fans at Knebworth Park in Stevenage. What those in the audience wouldn't have realised that day, however, was they were witnessing the original line-up's final live performance.

One of the band's biggest-ever gigs on home soil, the soundsystem featured a reported 5,000 amplifiers, more than eight miles of cable and a 600ft² video screen. You'd have thought, with all the pomp and ceremony of the occasion, that it would have been recorded – yet no pro-shot film of the performance exists. "Can you believe that on Freddie Mercury's last concert," Knebworth House's current occupant, Henry Lytton Cobbold, told *The Daily Express*, "no-one actually pressed 'Record'?"

"There's a Dutch bootleg of somebody filming a screen at the back of the audience for the whole show," Lytton Cobbold continued, "so there's a record of it, but no proper film."

That means there's no footage of the normally mild-mannered John Deacon smashing his bass into his amp after *Radio Ga Ga*. "He wasn't pissed off at his gear, he wasn't pissed off at me, I don't know what it was," recalled roadie Peter Hince in the book *Queen Unseen*. "John acted strangely on that tour; he was doing stuff that was out of character."

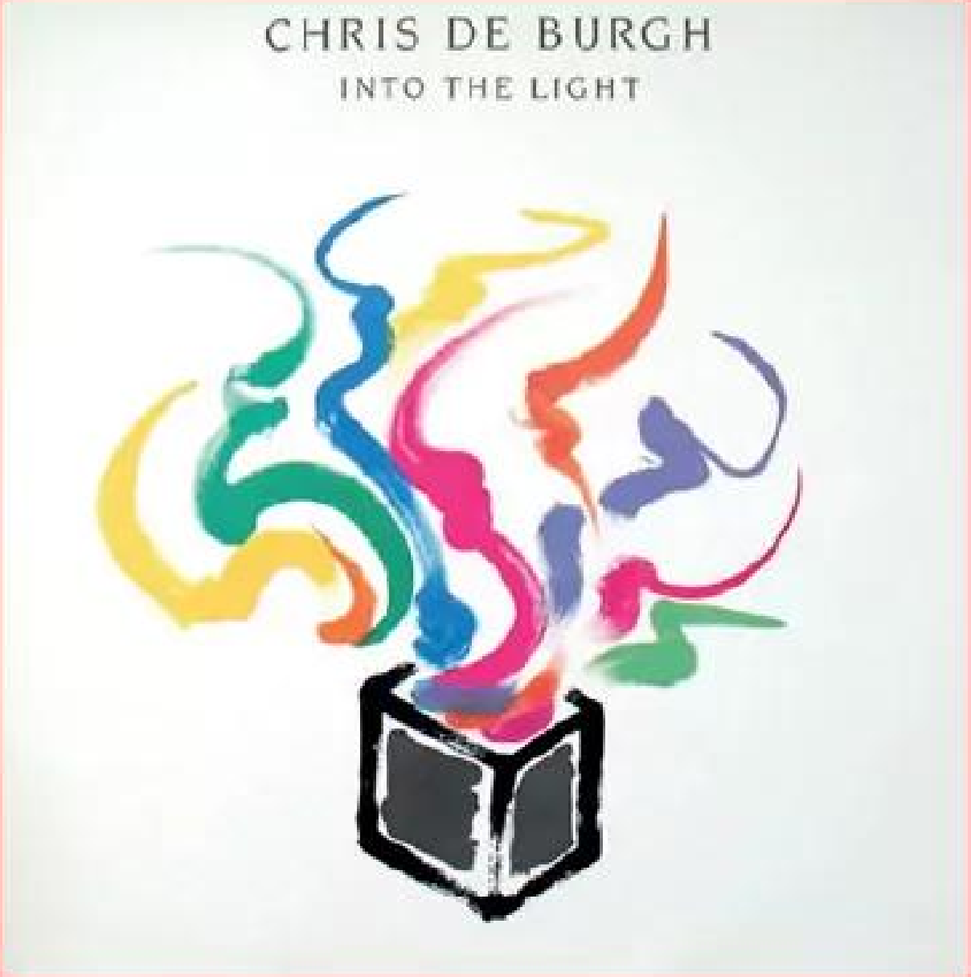
If the band had known it would be the final time the four of them would play live together, it's possible they would have arranged a film crew to be present, but as Brian May told *Guitar World*, none of them had any idea. "Did we know it would be the last time?" he reflected to the magazine. "No. Freddie said something like, 'Oh, I can't fucking do this anymore, my whole body's wracked with pain!' But he normally said things like that at the end of a tour, so I don't think we took it seriously, really."

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART

9 AUGUST 1986

① **TRUE BLUE**
MADONNA

② **INTO THE LIGHT**
CHRIS DE BURGH



③ **THE FINAL**
WHAM!

④ **A KIND OF MAGIC**
QUEEN

QUEEN
A Kind of Magic

⑤ **REVENGE**
EURYTHMICS

EURYTHMICS

BRYAN ADAMS IS BACK WITH A FEISTY NEW RECORD, *ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES*, SOUNDING LIKE A MAN REINVIGORATED. WE CATCH UP WITH HIM DURING HIS EUROPEAN ARENA TOUR TO DISCUSS THE "AWESOME" MEL C, HANGING OUT WITH IGGY POP, AND REMAINING UNBEATEN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

FELIX ROWE

BOXING CLEVER

"Hello," says the voice at the other end of the line. "Hi, is that Bryan?" we reply... First stupid question of the day. Of course it's Bryan Adams, you would recognise that voice anywhere: medium grit suspended in treacle. Distinctive and instantly familiar from childhood, closing out *Top Of The Pops* for 16 weeks straight in that Summer of '91.

Back to the here and now, for Bryan Adams it's a rare day off from his latest arena tour. He's a good sport, with a dry, self-effacing humour, occasionally taking the mickey in a deadpan manner that catches you unawares; sometimes turning the questions back on the interviewer. Last night he played Aberdeen. How was the show?

"Pretty good, I think," he offers. "There really haven't been any bad shows. It's just changing the setlist a bit every night."

Needless to say, he's not short of material. Across a 50-year career, Adams has exhibited that rare knack for writing universal anthems that seem to effortlessly flow out of him. Modern staples like *Summer Of '69*, *Run To You*, *Heaven*, *Everything I Do...* have become part of the bedrock of primetime radio.

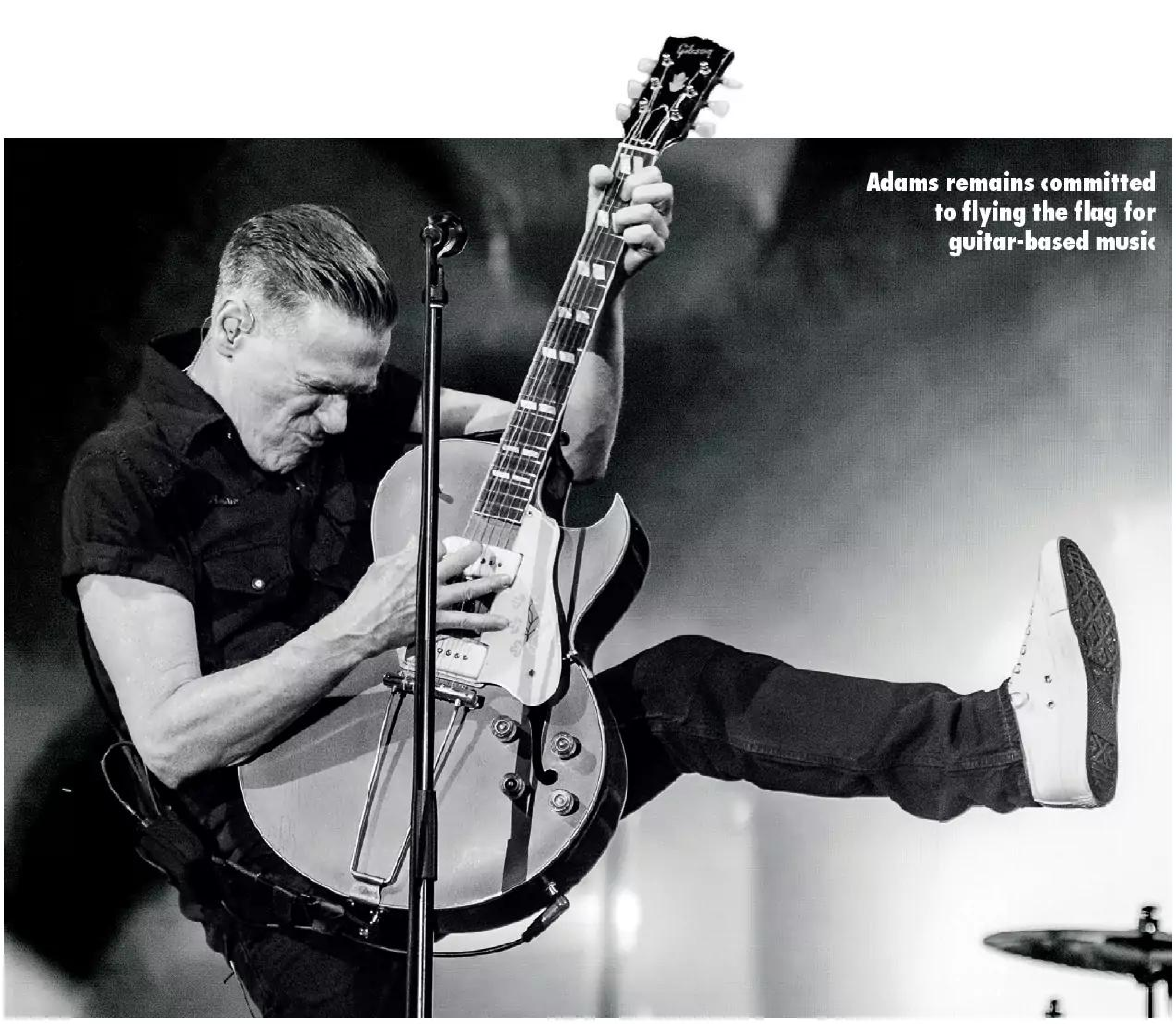
Just to keep things fresh, though, he's armed with an energetic new batch of tracks, *Roll With The Punches* (his 16th studio album), to spice up the established classics. Bryan opens the tour with the title track, a back-to-basics, honest rocker complete with barn-storming guitar solo – a dying artform in the modern pop single – and a muscular chorus that is tailor-made for audiences to scream back at him. Already, it's taking on a new life on tour.

"In many cases, you don't really get the chance to play new songs live before they come out," he says.

ROLL
WITH
PUNC

Knockout specialist: Bryan Adams returns with new studio album, *Roll With The Punches*

BRYAN ADAMS
ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES



Adams remains committed to flying the flag for guitar-based music

"We used to do that in the old days. We would just play whatever songs we had, and they would take on a form playing in clubs. And then you take that to the studio."

The title track carries an explicit theme of defiance; that sense of picking yourself up – no matter what life throws at you – and carrying on in good humour. It's a central ethos throughout Bryan's life.

"Well, I don't know if I know any other way, really. That's just who I am. I think that if I was to have accepted 'no' early on in my life I wouldn't have gotten anywhere. As it turns out, 'no' was an impetus for 'yes'… 'No' was an impetus for 'I'll show you!'"

Show us, he has. *Roll With The Punches* manages to sound huge while possessing a satisfying intimacy. So much modern pop can be suffocated by its own production, but Adams allows it space to breathe. You sense the band's presence at its core. It feels very much like three or four guys in a room, just blasting it out together.

"Yeah, that's the key," says Bryan. "That is how I make all my records. I don't really know how else to do it. I don't have enough keyboard savvy to be sitting there behind a bunch of synths. I just put everybody in the room, it's easier!"

It's particularly refreshing just to hear something that's stripped back a little. It's still highly-engineered and arena ready, but retains that rawness. He's aware of his wheelhouse, and there's an honest simplicity about that.

"I know that guitar music isn't particularly popular at the moment," Adams admits, "but it doesn't matter to me 'cause I know there are people out there that really like it, if they get a chance to hear it. So, I play to the converted."

Across Bryan's catalogue, the notion of a band of brothers has served him well over the years. Regular sidemen like long-term guitarist Keith Scott, and Pat Steward on drums, bolster that 'last gang in town' mentality, which feeds back into the recordings. It never just feels like a solo star plus hired hands; it feels like a unit.

"All the way, yeah. I always wanted to be in a band, you know? I never wanted to be the frontman, but that's the way it turned out. But I can still have the band vibe."

So while, the spotlight is on Bryan, every player gets a moment to shine.

FERTILE RELATIONSHIPS

Roll With The Punches sees Adams work with regular collaborator, Mutt Lange, whose credits include AC/DC (*Highway To Hell, Back In Black, For Those About To Rock We Salute You*) and Def Leppard (*High 'N' Dry, Pyromania, Hysteria, Adrenalize*).

"I love working with Mutt," Adams offers. "I don't think he is [particularly] interested in producing anymore, but he loves the process of songwriting so much. I've learned a lot from him over the years."

Lange gives Adams someone to bounce ideas off. "He just knows structure really well. The way we work, generally, is I'll have an idea for a song, whether it be a title, a chorus, or a verse or something, then I'll send that to him. And within a couple of days, he'll send me something back saying, 'What d'you think of this?' And so, it's just a back and forth over the internet."

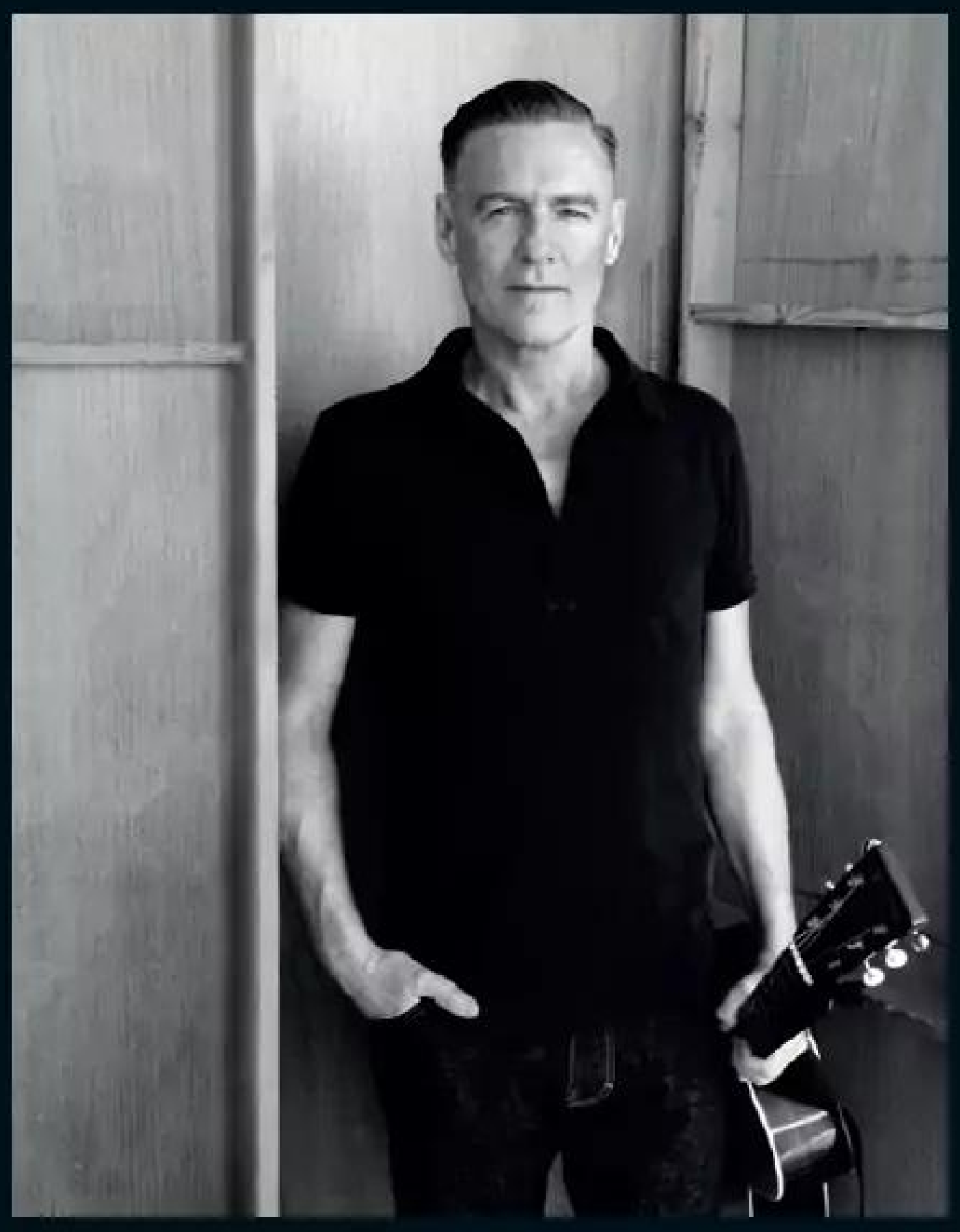
Another fertile relationship has been Adams' on-off songwriting partnership with Jim Vallance, stretching way back to 1978.

Jim co-wrote two songs on the new album, *How's That Working For Ya?* and *A Little More Understanding*. The latter is an infectious stomper that struts along on a funky groove.

"It was an old demo that Jim had sent me years ago. I have a library of things that I go back to, whether it be lyrics, guitar riffs or demos. And because I'm playing bass a

MAKING THE ULTIMATE SPACE TO CREATE

Bryan produced the new record in his own custom-built space, The Warehouse, a historic Vancouver landmark.



"I've always kind of produced my records," he says, "often with the help of Mutt back in the 90s. Now I do it all myself and I'm always in there."

Building his own space has given Adams free rein to do whatever he likes, whenever inspiration strikes. That must help to fuel the creativity. "One hundred percent," Bryan enthuses. "Having that studio has really changed everything for me. Everything's at your fingertips. I have all my guitars in one place, and I know what sounds I can get. Back in the early days, whenever we needed to hire in gear, it was frustrating as hell. It was like, 'Oh God, where's my amp?' Or, if you had to hire a guitar, 'what's this thing?'"

Essentially, it's the ultimate man cave. "The thing about that place, not only is it a music studio, but it's also a film studio. So, it's kind of like The Factory, if you think about how Warhol was doing his thing back in there. We're creating videos. We're creating photos. We're creating music. We're mixing. We're doing Atmos mixing. There's a huge amount of creativity that goes on in that space. I could be working in the morning on creating some pictures and then the afternoon working on a mix or recording something. So, you need the space to do that."

"IF I WAS TO HAVE ACCEPTED 'NO' EARLY ON IN MY LIFE I WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN ANYWHERE. AS IT TURNS OUT, 'NO' WAS AN IMPETUS FOR 'I'LL SHOW YOU!'"

Inset, a young and restless Adams photographed in the 80s and, main image, in his tighty-whities for a boxing-themed photoshoot to promote the new album

"I HAVE ALWAYS LIKED WORKING WITH PHOTOGRAPHERS, WHO ARE FACED WITH THE BIG CHALLENGE OF MAKING ME LOOK DECENT"

lot live these days, occasionally, we'll do a dance medley of songs just for a laugh. And in doing that, this song was inspired to go that direction. That's what happens when you put me on bass."

As with Mutt, their creative partnership has evolved. "With both guys, we don't sit together in a room anymore. It's similar in that sense.

"But those tracks with Jim are ideas that go back years that never found a home. That's just the way it is with some songs. They just don't come around right away, and probably for the better."

THE TAP DOESN'T STOP

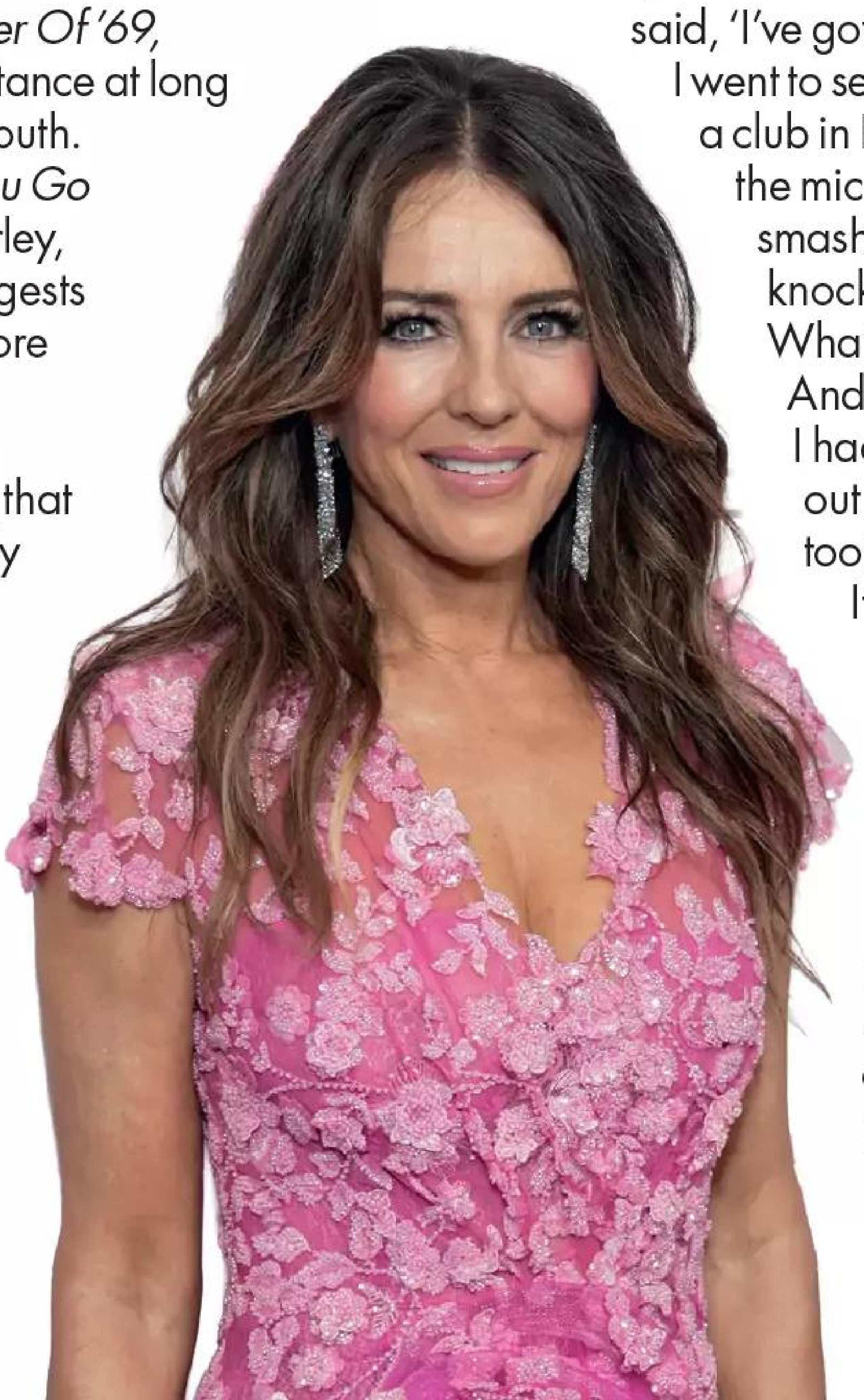
Adams is nothing if not prolific; always writing by default. He explains: "The tap doesn't necessarily go off. Then one day something will happen, like *Roll With The Punches* will come together, and that becomes the cornerstone song for an album. You know it right away, as soon as you get that particular song.

"It's happened to me umpteen times on records. In fact, every album has one sort of signature [track], and I thought, 'Oh yeah, that's the beginning of a record'.

"So, then you have your direction. And then you also have songs that you demoed prior to that, which you might need to rethink in order to bring them into that same energy space."

"I'm really excited about this album," Adams enthuses. Indeed, there are plenty of highlights elsewhere. *Make Up Your Mind* is another spirited rocker, with some turbo-charged drumming. *Will We Ever Be Friends Again* – thematically, if not musically – is an update on *Reckless*' anthemic classic *Summer Of '69*, looking back from a distance at long summer days and lost youth.

On *Never Ever Let You Go* (featuring Elizabeth Hurley, in the video), Bryan suggests a close connection is more important than pure perfection. He's talking about relationships, but that could just as easily apply to music – the need to let the honesty shine through above the production sparkle.



Long-time friend Elizabeth Hurley joins Bryan for a neon-lit rollercoaster ride in the recent video for *Never Ever Let You Go*

LIFE THRU A LENS

While it's music that made Adams a household name, photography has become a significant parallel career, with an equally impressive pedigree. He's photographed heads of state, royalty, and icons of stage and film.

"I have always liked working with photographers, who are faced with the big challenge of making me look decent," he jokes. And as a photographer, he's come face-to-face with a few of his own heroes.

"I worked with Iggy Pop not too long ago. It was one of the most exciting sessions for me 'cause I was already a fan of Iggy, but when he showed up by himself, he just exploded onto the set. It was really funny. In fact, I sat with him at one point and said, 'I've got to ask you something. I went to see you play in 1981 in a club in Brooklyn, and you took the microphone and you smashed it into your face and knocked your front tooth out. What was all that about?' And he goes, 'Oh yeah, I had knocked my tooth out before and I had this tooth that wouldn't stay in. It occasionally just kept falling out.' So yeah, it was part of that thing. Oh, it was so brilliant."

While Bryan's megastar credentials need no justifying, surely even he has felt a little insecure in the presence of some of the subjects he's photographed (from Kate Moss to Amy Winehouse; Mick Jagger to Justin Trudeau). It must be pretty nerve-wracking taking a picture of the Queen, for instance…

"Always, always humbled," he says sincerely. "I don't think I'm ever anything else but humbled. And that goes for everybody, really, 'cause it's a daunting task to make something really cool with somebody that you don't know."

Again, it comes back to the notion of getting the gang together. "I realised at some point the photographers that really were excelling were doing it with a team. They had somebody working on clothes, somebody working on hair, a couple of assistants checking lights.

"There was always this team around, so I work around that idea. Whether it be music, art, photos, you gotta have people that you can rely on, that are gonna be able to inspire you."

Bryan has published umpteen photography books, the latest, *#shotbyadams,* is a retrospective of the last 10 years' work. "I went back into my Queen and Prince Philip session and pulled a couple of rarities out of that one, and there's the odd thing that came in there that I've forgotten about."

As we speak, there's an exhibition in London, with various others in motion around the world. One particular venue to host his 'Wounded – Legacy Of War' exhibition has made an unexpected impression: the Reichstag, in Berlin.

"It's quite interesting to be able to do that, I mean, I didn't even know they did exhibitions there!"

It's just one of the many iconic and resonant buildings around the world that Bryan's career has taken him to over the years. "Yeah, it's crazy," he says. "At the Ryman Theater, in [Nashville] Tennessee, I was like, 'Didn't Elvis play here? Let's see if some of that mojo could wear off on us!'"

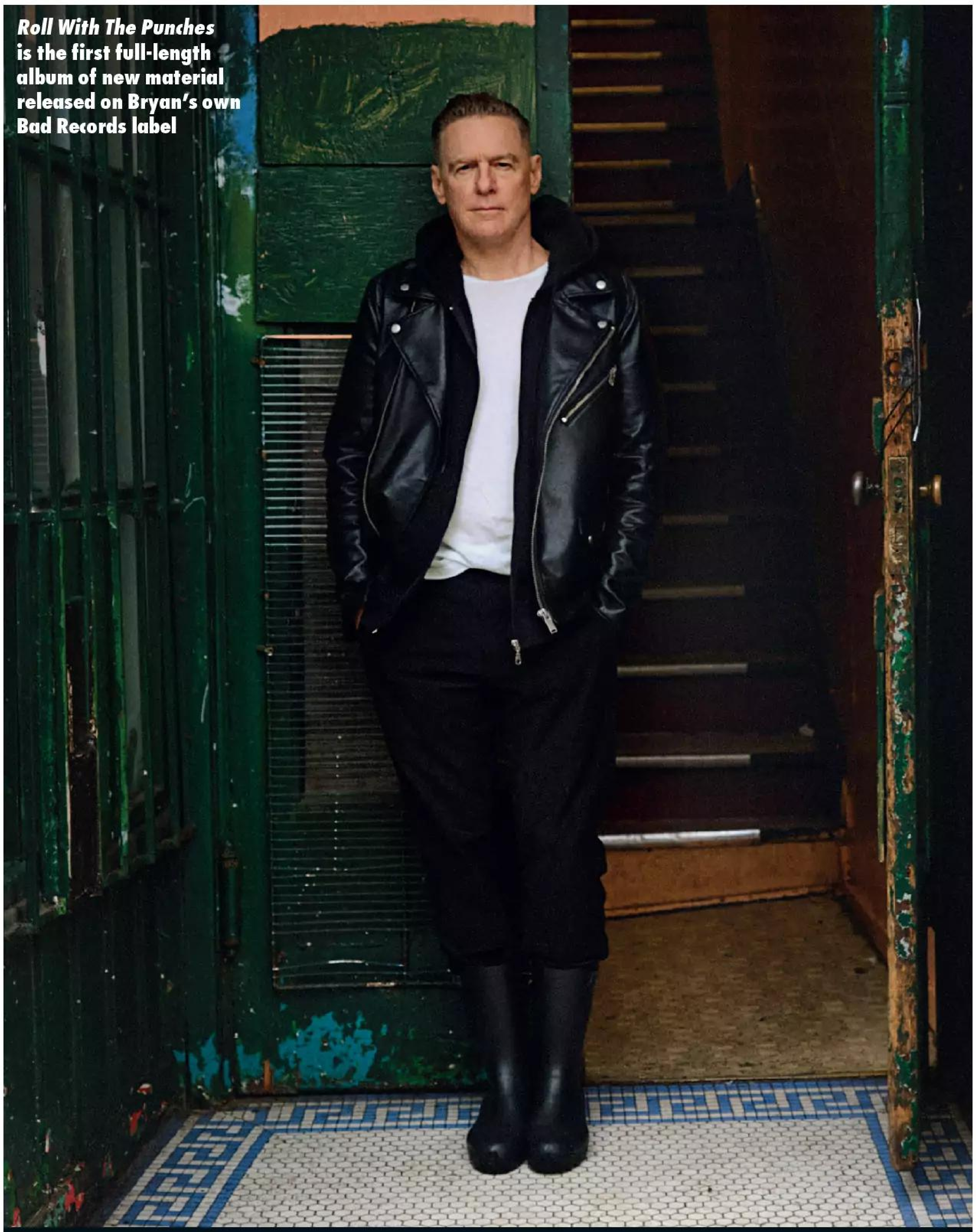
Another personal favourite is the Royal Albert Hall, where Bryan performed a three-night residency in May 2024.

"The first thing that came to mind when we first played there, years ago, was the Zeppelin shows," he says, "and I saw Cream there when they did their film. I love that building. It's one of the best places in the world to play."

AN UNDEFEATED RECORD

There's one institution that Adams will be forever associated with. No doubt, he's bored to tears of being asked about it, but we couldn't pass up on the chance to mention *(Everything I Do) I Do It For You,* which to this day remains the longest ever consecutive No.1 in the UK charts: 16 weeks, which even The Beatles didn't come close to. It doesn't seem something like that could happen again.

"Oh, sure it can," Bryan counters. "I mean, there's been people that are already close." (Indeed, fellow Canadian, Drake, almost equalled it with 15 weeks with *One Dance* in 2016.) Still, no-one's topped it yet. That must feel pretty special? "Hmmm, that is amazing and long may it be so, but the



***Roll With The Punches* is the first full-length album of new material released on Bryan's own Bad Records label**

SITTING PRETTY IN THEATRELAND

A recent milestone for Adams was the launch of his stage show *Pretty Woman: The Musical,* co-written with Jim Vallance, which made its debut in Chicago in 2018, then Broadway, before touring the world.

"I had to coax Jim into doing it originally, because he was, like, 'Nah!' He went all quiet and then, one day, I open my email and he'd sent me this song idea, *Welcome To Hollywood.* I was like, 'huh, I knew you'd want to do it!"

The project meant entering a different headspace. "That was sort of songwriting by committee, you know, directors and the book writer."

Writing for musicals, he explains, has to be very literal: "Write right on the nose. When we first started, it was like, 'Okay, we better start again, because they're not gonna get this.' And sure enough, that's exactly what happened."

They had to really adjust the way they worked. "It drove Jim insane. There were so many times where we were asked to do something, and then you do what that is, and then they forget they asked you! That kind of stuff was, in some ways, frustrating. I felt Jim's pain a lot, but at the same time I was like, 'Come on, let's just have a sandwich and then carry on', you know? It's gonna be all right!"

But clearly the experience hasn't put off Adams entirely. "I've actually started another idea. I'm working with a film company right now – we're developing a completely new original musical, that's coming together."

"MUTT SAID *EVERYTHING I DO* HAD AN INTERNATIONAL MELODY AND HE WAS RIGHT, THERE WASN'T A COUNTRY IN THE WORLD THAT DIDN'T PLAY THAT SONG"

reality is that something will eventually knock it off. Up until I came along with that song, do you know what song was holding the record?"

CP pauses to think... Wet Wet Wet came pretty close at some point? "That wasn't it. Wet Wet Wet was trying for my title. No, before that was Slim Whitman with *Rose Marie* from, like, 1955." [The US country star spent 11 consecutive weeks topping the UK chart, holding the record for 36 years.]

"So, the week that we got the record, I found Slim in America, flew him over to England, and we played *Rose Marie* and *Everything I Do* together at Wembley. It was just beautiful. He was such a dude."

A neat full circle. But, looking on another 34 years, the whole musical landscape has changed once more. Bryan and Slim's feat was based on people physically going into shops, buying a record, CD or cassette – parting with cash. Nowadays, the charts incorporate other measures like streaming services... "Streaming, what's that?" Bryan deadpans before offering, "I'm just teasing you!"

But surely it adds extra resonance to the occasion, being based on physical sales. People aren't buying records like they did; there's a strong case that the milestone was even more impressive when Bryan achieved it in 1991, compared to today, given how people consume music and the level of engagement it requires.

"I see what you mean. Yeah, of course. It's an amazing thing to have been part of. And I wish I had more moments of writing songs in 45 minutes like that, but you know, it was of a time."

So, when they wrote that particular song, was Bryan aware that he had a colossal smash hit on his hands?

"Of course not."

Do you ever know?

"I had no idea, but I knew that Mutt did, because I remember him pulling into the studio one day and he said, 'You know what? This song really has an international melody', and those words stuck with me because he was so right. There wasn't a country in the world that didn't play that song afterwards."

It's definitely got that universal quality...

"When he was producing it, he was thinking global. Hats off to both Mutt and Michael Kamen, because they're the ones that were really the geniuses behind it."

As for the song's association with the Hollywood film, *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves,* Bryan says: "We weren't even thinking about the film; we were just thinking about making a record."

Of course, another track that holds a special place in many people's hearts is his hit collaboration with Melanie C, *When You're Gone.* But that hook-up had a surprising genesis.

"I met her in a lift," explains Adams. "I was just finishing up an album, and I was in Los Angeles. I got in the lift and she was getting in, too, and I said, 'Oh hello and where are you going? Up to the bar? Okay, I'll go along!' And that's how it came together."

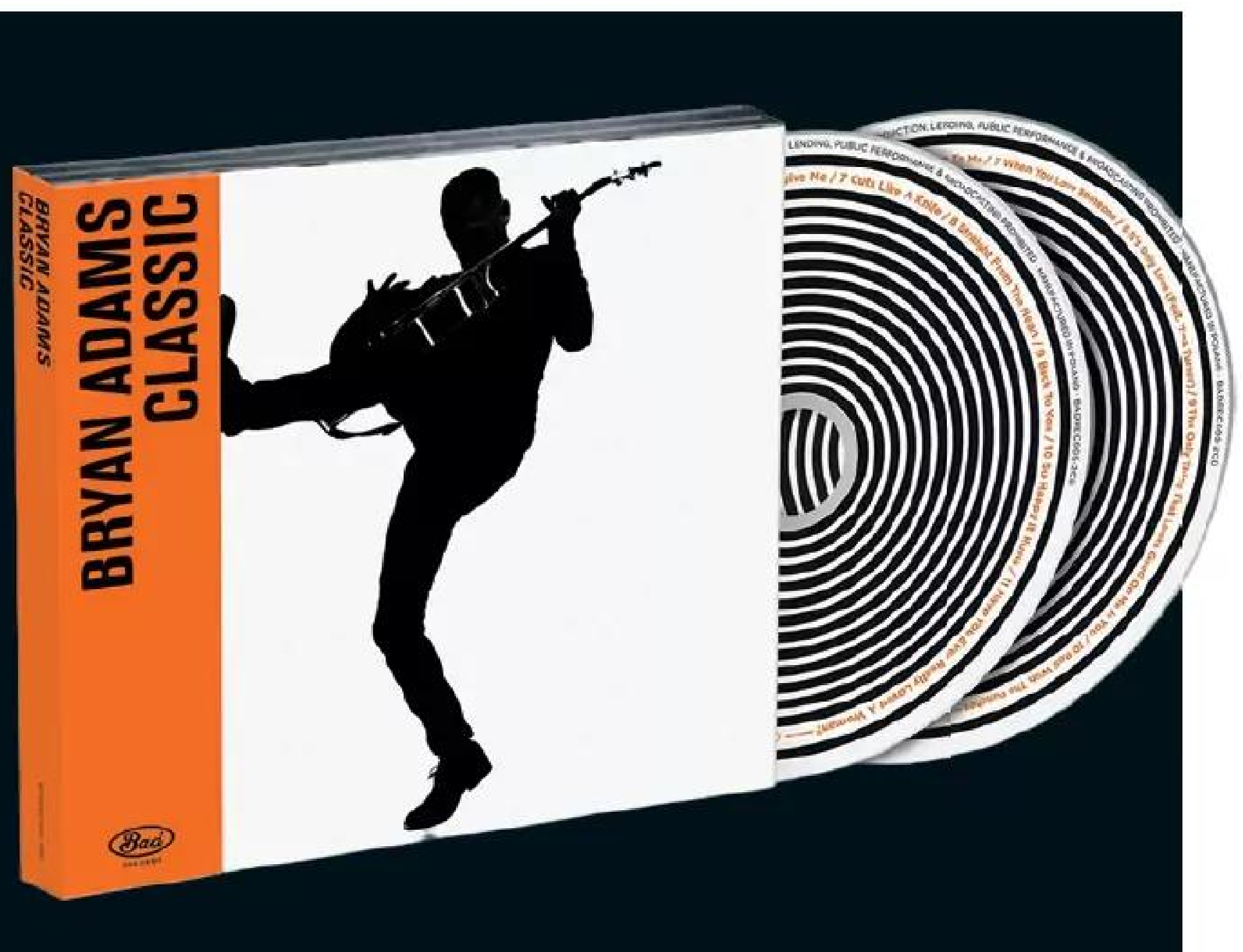
So, it wasn't one of those cringey moments, squeezed in awkwardly waiting for your floor. "What, and like, farting?" he fires back, sounding vaguely incriminated... "No, it was very serendipitous. She is awesome. A real trooper, man, she just gets on with it."

DEFIANT SPIRIT

Bryan's recent activity seems to represent a concerted effort to take back autonomy of his career and secure his legacy. He's set up his own label, Bad Records – "The whole thing comes from my school nickname, which was Badams." He's also re-recorded the classic hits to take ownership of the masters. Adams has long produced himself; he now manages himself, too, for the first time in four decades. He's had good reason to roll with the punches.

"Coming out of the last couple of years, it was tough," he says. "I've been with

REVISITING THE CLASSICS



Following the trend of artists like Taylor Swift, Bryan recently re-recorded many iconic songs from his back catalogue for the two-part *Classic* collection. It must bring back a few memories. But how do you recapture that same studio magic?

"Well, that's interesting because, with the exception of one or two rooms that we recorded them in, I have all the guitars, I have all the pedals and everything that I had back in those days when I was making those records. All I needed to do was remember what I did, and, of course, there's no notes. So, I'd call the encyclopaedia of recording in my band. And that's Keith Scott. He knows everything. He remembers what guitar I was using, what amps, what pedals."

It sounds like a fun adventure down memory lane. "Yeah, it really was. I mean, Jeff Lynne, who I worked with, had also done it with his ELO records. He was like, 'Man, why don't you just do that?' And then, of course, Taylor Swift has done it, and I think Def Leppard have done it as well. So, it just made sense."

Reflecting on that substantial body of work, did he ever imagine, back when he was making those recordings, that 40 years later they would still have that kind of resonance?

"Of course not. That's the only thing really. We were just hopeful. In your early days, you're hopeful that it's gonna resonate with people."

Adams recently revisited *It's Only Love*, his duet with Tina Turner, for Record Store Day 2025 (pictured below)

Universal, and signed to a contract, since I was 18. So, to suddenly be free was strange, but at the same time really inspiring. I was definitely emboldened by my freedom. I felt like I've been let out of school."

Because he can control his wider artistic vision more closely?

"That was always the case, but there was something more personal about it when you know it's going to be your record company putting it out," he says.

"Back in the day, you would have to do it by committee. Everyone had a job, and so they would try to push doing things that they liked. And that's why in the beginning I never used to have my own photographs on albums, because I always thought, 'Oh, I have to use so-and-so'. But that's not the case. At some point in the 90s, I went, 'I'm not going to do that anymore!'"

Bryan's been testing the water with the new label, releasing his own versions of two songs he wrote for Kiss back in 1981 last year, followed by a Royal Albert Hall boxset, and a new version of his Tina Turner duet (*It's Only Love*) for Record Store Day 2025.

After a chance encounter in a Los Angeles lift, Bryan collaborated with Melanie C on the UK No.3 hit single *When You're Gone*

"It's exciting, because it's just all about the music. If we can wash our face, that's great. But, like you were saying, people don't particularly buy albums anymore. If you're going to do it, you've got to do it in a way that it really is something quite interesting and quality."

BRYAN ADAMS & TINA TURNER
IT'S ONLY LOVE
RECORD STORE DAY

It appears like Bryan's latest flurry of activity is all about wrapping up unfinished business and there's still a lot more yet to come. Does Adams have a stockpile of ideas tucked away on a shelf for the next record?

"Yeah, there's probably about 10 other songs, a lot of extra material that could have been on the record, but there's too many songs. I didn't want to put out a record with 20 tracks, because no one's going to hear them that way. So, it's better to sort of come out slowly."

While, generally, Bryan's output is not overtly political, *Roll With The Punches* carries particular resonance in light of the current international climate – not least Canada's relationship with the USA. So was that wider worldview in Bryan's headspace, as well as the more personal impetus of self-autonomy?

"Of course," he says. "But if you wanted to look at not being particularly political, listen to *Ultimate Love* or *Don't Drop That Bomb On Me* or *What If There Were No Sides At All*. There are lots of things that get my politics across without having to be overtly political." Fair point.

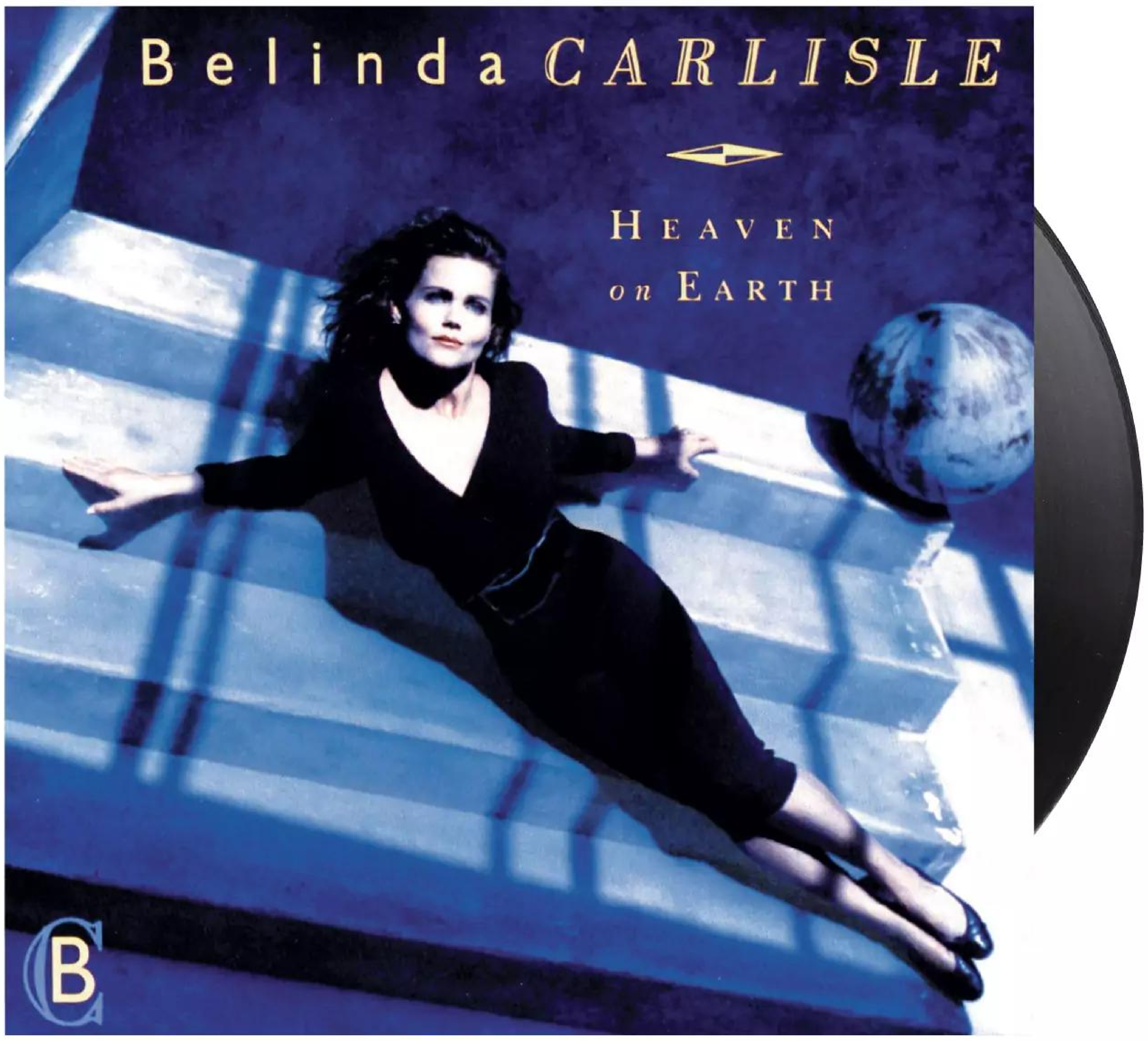
At 65, Bryan's looking trim as ever, while his voice continues to age like a rich-bodied malt whisky. These gruelling arena tours must be pretty intensive on both body and soul. What's Bryan's secret to staying match fit on tour? "I just put the kettle on and have a cup of tea," says Adams. "That's pretty much it really. You know what? The best thing is getting enough sleep. If you can get enough sleep, you'll be all right."

But how do you manage that when you've just come off stage to 20,000 people? That's a skill in itself, to have that power to switch off.

"You know – like last night in Aberdeen – I could come off the stage and go straight to bed."

It's a far cry from 'reckless' or 'waking up the neighbours', but clearly Bryan's perfected the formula for sticking around for the long haul. Cup of tea, anyone? ■

● *Roll With The Punches* is released on 29 August via BAD Records and will be reviewed in the next issue



Belinda Carlisle, photographed in Beverly Hills during the promotion of *Heaven On Earth*, her second solo LP after splitting from The Go-Go's

CLASSIC ALBUM

HEAVEN ON EARTH

BELINDA CARLISLE

THE SECOND ALBUM FROM THE GO-GO'S FRONTWOMAN-TURNED-SOLO STAR GAVE HER A HUGE NO.1 SINGLE THAT BECAME A TIMELESS ANTHEM. IT'S A CONFIDENT COMING-OF-AGE STATEMENT, WHICH ENSURED HER ASCENT FROM DIVE BAR TO DIVA.

FELIX ROWE

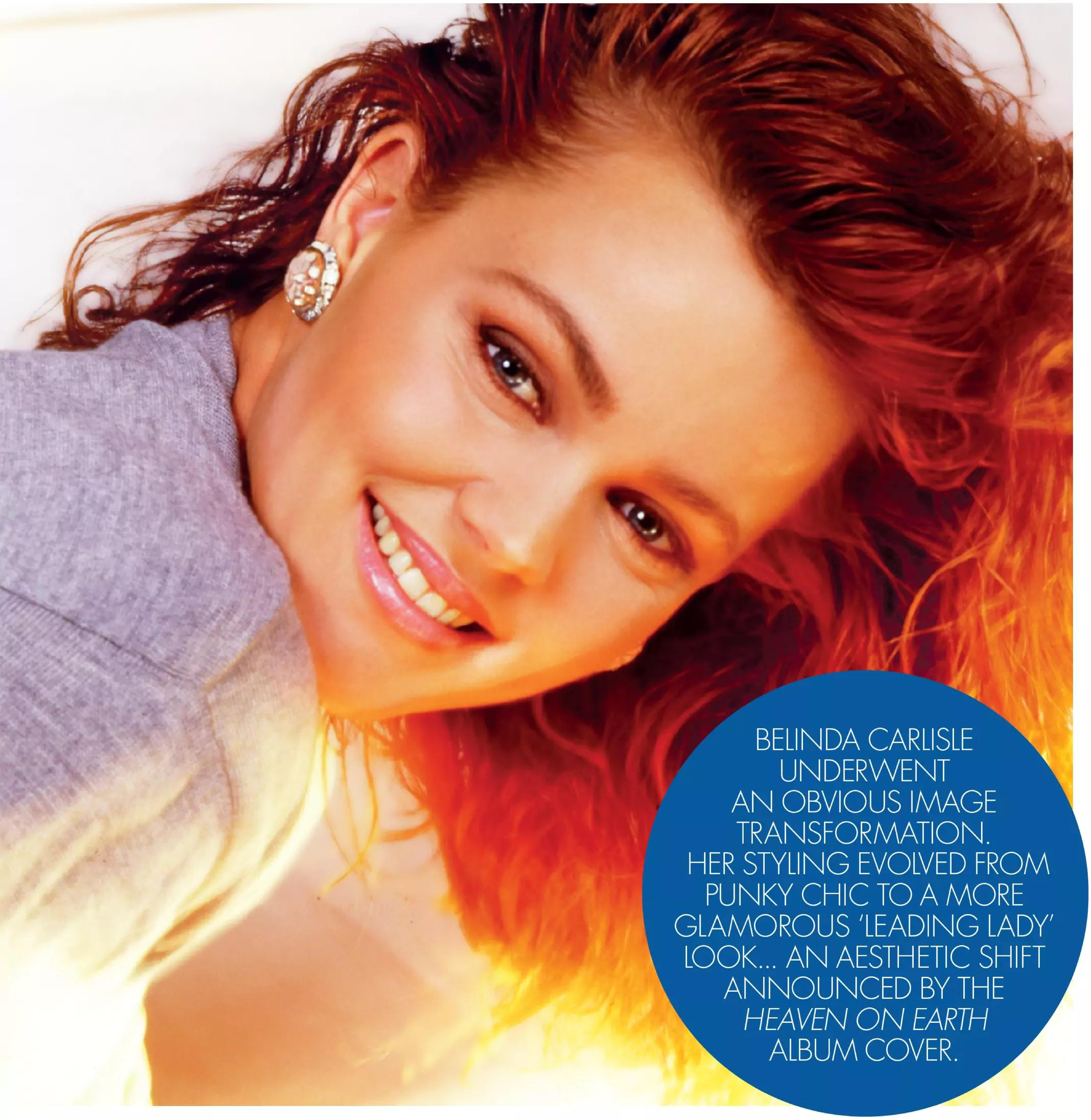
Belinda Carlisle's 1987 single *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* is so thoroughly woven into the fabric of modern life, it's hard to imagine a time when it didn't exist. Ubiquitous and comfortingly familiar, it swiftly became a jukebox staple and continues to pop up with regularity. Its parent album, abbreviated to *Heaven On Earth*, is an equally significant cultural marker that cemented the singer's place in pop history.

Following the huge success and subsequent demise of Los Angeles' all-female new wavers, The Go-Go's (who themselves had enjoyed six weeks atop the Billboard Album Chart with *Beauty And The Beat*), this record affirmed her status as a global solo star. Carlisle's first solo album, 1986's eponymous *Belinda*, showed promise, producing a Top 3 US hit, *Mad About You*. But, in truth, that record was somewhat patchy. Bags of fun, but still largely indebted to 60s girl group gone new wave – in other words, a slightly poppier Go-Go's, rather than an artist forging a distinctive sound of her own.

Heaven On Earth, however, would prove to be a coming of age.

Not that many artists successfully make the transition from group member to solo star. Speaking to *Classic Pop* in 2017, Carlisle acknowledged: "It was very intimidating going solo. I had to really find my feet... "I was really insecure about being out there as the complete focus. I couldn't bounce things off other people on stage." Later, she notes of that time, she "felt like an imposter for years".

However, the powers-that-be clearly had belief, judging by the considerable studio resources allocated to the project. Even for a time when label money was being thrown around quite excessively, nailing Carlisle's record seems to have been considered a big priority. It was her first album for the label MCA, having so far built her career with Miles Copeland's I.R.S., and the move signified a considerable step up. There was a fair amount riding on its success, both for the label (which desperately needed a hit after



BELINDA CARLISLE UNDERWENT AN OBVIOUS IMAGE TRANSFORMATION. HER STYLING EVOLVED FROM PUNKY CHIC TO A MORE GLAMOROUS 'LEADING LADY' LOOK... AN AESTHETIC SHIFT ANNOUNCED BY THE *HEAVEN ON EARTH* ALBUM COVER.

some restructuring) and Carlisle herself, looking to reassert her presence.

Since the release of 1984's *Talk Show*, the last Go-Go's album before the band's 2001 return, a new star had risen in their wake: Madonna, who was, coincidentally, born exactly one day before Belinda in the same year. A retooled Carlisle could be MCA's solution, though adopting a more guitar-driven approach, compared to Madonna's dance-oriented club focus.

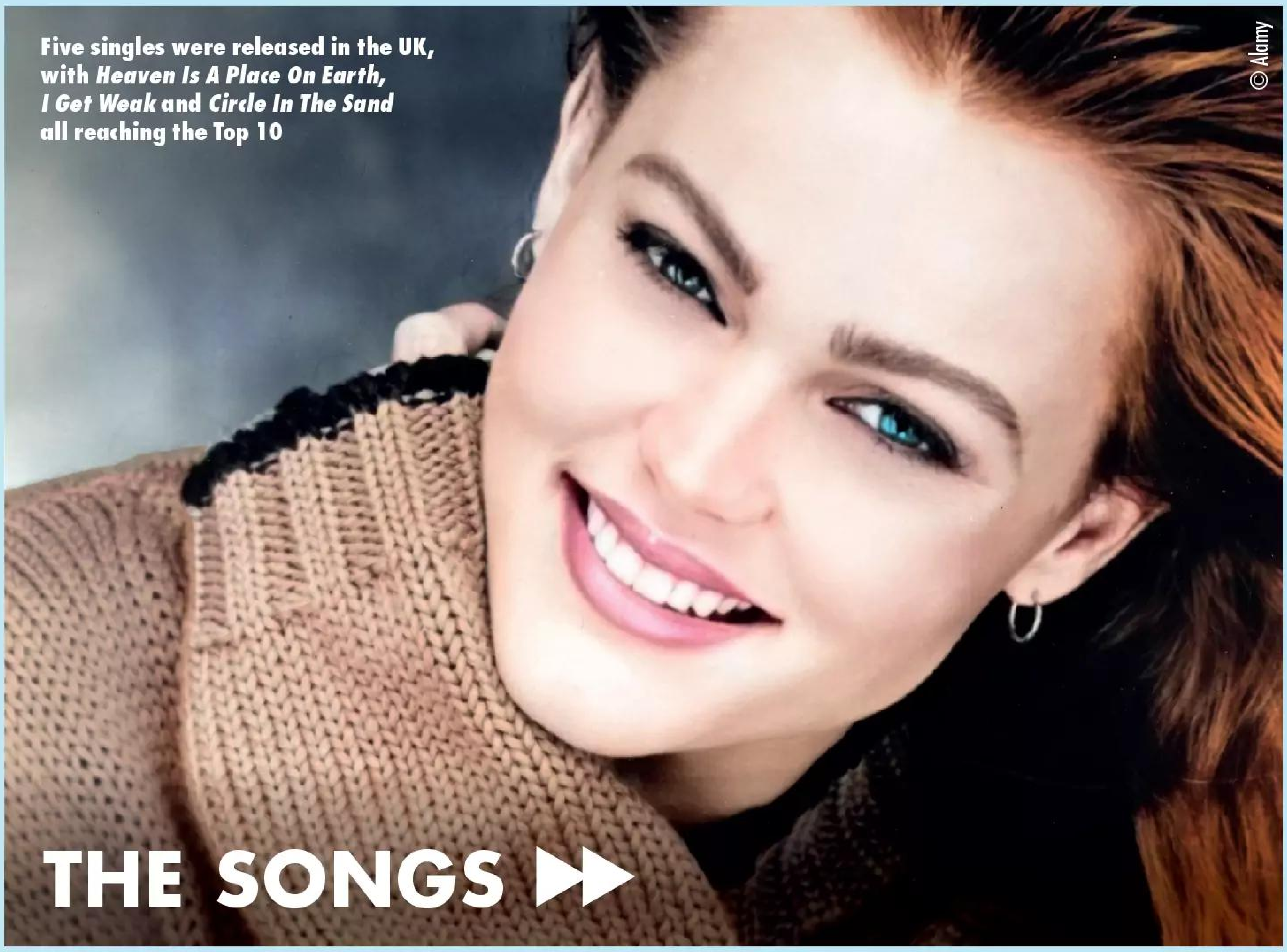
Indeed, *Heaven On Earth* has a more muscular sound than Carlisle had ever presented before. She traded The Go-Go's breezy, sugary vibe for something meatier, reflecting the turbo-charged power pop production techniques then developing in the mid-80s. Her voice is audibly richer, too; fuller-bodied, toning down the higher-pitched bubblegum sound that was still evident on her solo debut.

Part of this might be explained by the walls of stacked powerhouse backing vocals. But even in the subtler moments, when it strips back to just Belinda's bare vocal, there's a mature world-weariness to her delivery. More diva than dive bar.

Carlisle underwent an obvious image transformation, too. Her styling evolved from the punky chic of The Go-Go's to a more iconic and glamorous 'leading lady' look. This very deliberate aesthetic shift is announced on the cover of *Heaven On Earth* – beautifully shot, cheekbones accentuated in shadow, like a timeless star of the silver screen.

CUTTING THE RECORD

Production duties and much of the songwriting were handled by Rick Nowels, then a relative newcomer who had recently made his name with Stevie Nicks. A childhood acquaintance of Nicks, he co-wrote her single *I Can't Wait* and took on wider co-production for the album *Rock A Little* (1985). Though today a top-tier writer for the stars, at that point he was still largely unproven himself. It was Nicks who apparently suggested that Carlisle seek him out, to take her career to the next level.



Five singles were released in the UK, with *Heaven Is A Place On Earth*, *I Get Weak* and *Circle In The Sand* all reaching the Top 10

© Alamy

THE SONGS ▶▶

① HEAVEN IS A PLACE ON EARTH

A strong contender for the most bombastic opening to a pop song ever. The phrase 'power chord' was surely coined to describe this track. *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* adheres to the George Martin school of arranging, by whacking the hook upfront (otherwise known as 'don't bore us, get to the chorus'). Just a thunderous kick drum, then boom!, straight into that famous singalong refrain delivered by multilayered vocals. In fact, the immediate touchstone for the track was Bon Jovi's *You Give Love A Bad Name*. The lyrics were apparently inspired by a truckstop postcard. Not Shakespeare then, but sometimes, you need that blunt, direct message to break through, and its universal theme continues to resonate. Needless to say, it conquered the charts practically everywhere and remains Carlisle's only US Billboard No.1 single to date. The chutzpah is capped off with the obligatory final-chorus key change. *Heaven...* has taken on a life of its own, a classic pop-rock anthem and jukebox standard.

② CIRCLE IN THE SAND

Infinitely more subtle than the opener; and though not as immediate, *Circle In The Sand* is arguably more musically interesting. Rather than building up in linear fashion to an explosive singalong chorus, it simply skulks along with a circular quality. The lyrics instantly conjure imagery of a sandy beach at sunset, piña colada in hand. The arrangement has an ethereal shimmering quality, thanks to Thomas Dolby's keyboards, combined with session players John McCurry and John Pierce on guitar and bass respectively. Another Top 10 single.

③ I FEEL FREE

A spirited cover of the Cream favourite. A refreshing and unexpected delight – far better in reality than it might seem on paper. The trippy, sampled male vocal refrain in the opening bars feels genuinely innovative and fresh even now. Where *Heaven Is A Place On Earth*'s overbearing production might understandably feel a little stodgy to some, this track positively jumps out of the speakers as a futurist punch contrasted with throwback psychedelia. Released as a single, in the US it reached a paltry No.88, but deserved to be a much bigger hit for Carlisle. It also features in the 1988 'two Coreys' film, *License To Drive*.

④ SHOULD I LET YOU IN?

The first of several co-writes from Belinda's ex-Go-Go's pal, guitarist Charlotte Caffey (along with Australian, Mark Holden on this track). *Should I Let You In?* kicks off with an ominous tribal drum pulse, before erupting into more standard pop-rock fair, echoing The Go-Go's new wave style, though more muscular and tooled up. The guitars ring out with a satisfying jangle, and when combined with the vocal, the effect is like Blondie meets The Byrds. Carlisle exercises her strong vibrato, affecting a raspy voice, which is embellished with era-typical guitar licks (caked in delay, chorus and every other effect available). A fine album cut, it's tailor-made to soundtrack some generic late-80s primetime TV show, probably starring David Hasselhoff.

⑤ WORLD WITHOUT YOU

The first of two tracks in a row on the album that was written by Diane Warren. *World Without You* is a sweet, silky song showcasing a softer falsetto chorus, that floats along gently on a vaguely doo-woppy, girl-group vibe. Released as a single, it reached No.34 in the UK.

⑥ I GET WEAK

Songwriter Diane Warren apparently "had Stevie Nicks in mind" when she first shared *I Get Weak* with producer Rick Nowels. But it was deemed a great fit for Carlisle, and so Stevie's loss was Belinda's gain. It's a fine cut, similar in style and tone to *World Without You*, and less in-yer-face than some of its counterparts. But it's effective. Nevertheless, there's a cute likability to the lilting melody over the descending chords. Though essentially a ballad, the new wave stylings and driving backbeat keep the momentum going, rather than descending into a more plodding or sludgy affair. It was another hit, just missing the No.1 spot in the US, while also making the Top 10 in the UK.

⑦ WE CAN CHANGE

The pace picks up once again with the help of bright synth chimes (seemingly using the same keyboard preset as *Born In The U.S.A.*) and more jangly guitars. It's another Caffey co-write (this time with Nowels), and again has a distinct Go-Go's feel – an upbeat song, with a positive message about making the world better by first starting with ourselves. Indeed, presumably by sheer coincidence, it shares the same lyrical sentiment as Michael Jackson's *Man In The Mirror* (released on his *Bad* album in the same year). It's catchy, for sure. The arrangement hits in all the right places – just try resisting the urge to sing along to all those "whoa, whoas!" in the chorus. Ultimately though, the lyric lets it down – just a little too anodyne due to its naïve, happy-clappy optimism.

⑧ FOOL FOR LOVE

Another up-tempo rocker, with all the usual production embellishments: a cavernous snare drum, chugging guitars and brash sparkly synths. *Fool For Love* was written by Robbie Seidman, who has penned several songs for Carlisle throughout her career. *Fool For Love* occupies that spot in the tracklisting often reserved for the weaker material (that is, tucked away in the middle of Side B). On first impression, it feels a little lightweight; not awful, by any stretch, but neither does it ever quite catch fire. But in fairness, it's a grower that improves with time. You certainly won't forget the title – repeated endlessly in the refrain throughout.

⑨ NOBODY OWNS ME

A rallying cry to the independent spirit – "no-one owns me and no-one can ever tell me what to do", Carlisle declares with genuine conviction (although the song title fails to mention the lyrics' caveat of "nobody but you"). Of course, Carlisle did show that she was not prepared to be pushed about, refusing to include certain songs on the record that she wasn't keen on. So, this track holds particular resonance. True to its sentiment, *Nobody Owns Me* is one of several high-octane rockers (again a Caffey co-write), similar in energy and intensity of the preceding track, though packing a much bigger punch.

⑩ LOVE NEVER DIES

The record ends on a more plaintive note; a yearning, heart-aching slowburner ballad, with a title straight out of a Bond film. In style and volume, it's the polar opposite of the opening track – but lyrically, they share an obvious kinship, together neatly bookending the album. *Love Never Dies* features a dynamic vocal that builds in intensity from a whisper to raspy pleading – indeed it's that rawness that rescues it from potential sappiness, Carlisle's voice often on the edge of breaking. When she soars into those long held notes in the chorus refrain, it's incredibly touching, without any of the Disney Princess sheen that so typically accompanies a rousing ballad like this. It occupies a similar space to Kim Carnes' 1981 hit, *Bette Davis Eyes*. A single in the UK (impressively, it was her fifth on these shores from the 10-track album), though it criminally missed the Top 40, peaking at No.54 in 1988.

The album was recorded in various studios around Hollywood, which seems to have rubbed off on its sound.

Heaven On Earth has that West Coast, Golden State sunshine embedded into its very core. Much of that essence probably has to do with the top LA session players who performed on the record. Among the many California luminaries, backing vocals were provided by Michelle Phillips of The Mamas & The Papas, and the late Brian Wilson's daughter, Carnie. Token Londoner Thomas Dolby pops up on keyboards. The wider credits list is a roll call of top-flight sessioners, well-known in studio circles.

To pick just one example at random, guitarist Dann Huff was simultaneously employed on Michael Jackson's *Bad* in the same year. The result sounds expensive.

Despite the army of contributors (at least seven guitarists are listed alone), it still sounds remarkably consistent across the 10 tracks. From the off, *Heaven On Earth* asserts a clearly defined sound that's maintained throughout. You know what you're getting: solid drivetime pop-rock. There won't be an arty monologue halfway through; a ham-fisted rap to get onto R'n'B playlists; or a cynical club banger hoping to light up the dance charts. As Carlisle has affirmed over the years, she knows her strengths, she knows her limitations, and evidently, she knows the market the record is aimed at. The album is all the better for it.

PUNK SPIRIT

The record sounds incredibly bombastic in that late-80s American way – with huge drums, huge guitars, huge vocals. It sits comfortably at home with the drivetime radio of the era – Springsteen, Bon Jovi, Bryan Adams etc.

In a retrospective interview with the BBC's Mark Goodier, Carlisle remembers metal band Anthrax recording in the studio next door. In the same discussion, she talks of retaining her punk spirit, even as she transcended it to become a pop star.

Her singing isn't particularly flashy or technical, but it's authentic and honest – Carlisle delivers her anthems with compassion and heart, free of ostentation. But she more than ably holds her own, living up to those gutsy arrangements; always ensuring her personality shines through.

As for the songs, the writing took a big step up, too, from the first album. Nowels worked with fellow songwriter, Ellen Shipley, herself a minor 80s solo star, to compose two of the key singles: *Heaven Is A Place on Earth* and *Circle In The Sand*. Meanwhile, four of the tracks were written or co-written by Carlisle's former Go-Go's bandmate, Charlotte Caffey. And another worldclass songwriter, Diane Warren, provided two more.

In an alternative universe, *Waiting For A Star To Fall* (a huge smash for its writers, Boy Meets Girl) could have been a hit for Carlisle. Although reluctantly demoed for the album, Belinda steadfastly refused to include it. A rough bootleg demo can be found if you know where to look.

Hindsight, of course, is invaluable, but her reticence is interesting given that it's arguably stronger material than at least one or two offerings on this record. Maybe the ex-punk felt it was just a little too saccharine for her tastes; still she could easily have clad it in heavy armour and blasted it out the park.

Its rejection, coupled with another Warren-penned track, *Some Hearts* (later a hit for Carrie Underwood), proves unequivocally that Carlisle would only release something she had a personal affinity with.

Heaven On Earth achieved No.13 on the US Billboard chart (which, in truth, feels surprisingly low given its ongoing cultural resonance), and was a UK No.4 hit. However, it faired even better in other territories, reaching No.1 in Norway (a-ha obviously didn't have a record out that week).

***Heaven On Earth* reached No.4 in the UK where it has been certified triple Platinum**

THE PLAYERS ▶▶

BELINDA CARLISLE
The former punk and frontwoman of new wave icons The Go-Go's was transformed on *Heaven On Earth* into a glamorous solo star, whose output helped to define 80s pop-rock.

RICK NOWELS
The album's producer, and co-writer of many of the songs, plays a range of instruments on the record. Starting his career with Stevie Nicks, he went on to work with Celine Dion, Madonna, Lana Del Rey and Dido. Nowels co-wrote the New Radicals' smash, *You Get What You Give*.

JOHN PIERCE
Bassist for Huey Lewis And The News since the mid-90s, Pierce often works with Nowels and has performed on records for Kenny Loggins, Bonnie Tyler and Barbra Streisand among others.

KENNY ARONOFF
A top session drummer who has played with everyone from The Rolling Stones, Sting, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney and Elton John to Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Rod Stewart, Bruce Springsteen and Lady Gaga.

THOMAS DOLBY
Plays 'additional keyboards' on the record, including its two biggest hits.

CHARLOTTE CAFFEY
As well as providing backing vocals, Carlisle's former Go-Go's bandmate co-wrote four of the album's tracks.

ELLEN SHIPLEY
A solo artist in her own right, Shipley co-wrote *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* as well as *Circle In The Sand* alongside Nowels, and returned to write for Carlisle throughout her career.

> THE ALBUM WAS RECORDED IN VARIOUS STUDIOS AROUND HOLLYWOOD, WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE RUBBED OFF ON ITS SOUND. *HEAVEN ON EARTH* HAS THAT GOLDEN STATE SUNSHINE EMBEDDED INTO ITS VERY CORE.

THE VIDEOS

HEAVEN IS A PLACE ON EARTH
Directed by Hollywood actress Diane Keaton, who had just completed a documentary titled *Heaven*. We're treated to countless abstract angles of Carlisle spinning around to master what became her trademark hair flick. Meanwhile, masked figures, holding globes like glowing orbs in various configurations, are contrasted with soft-focus, slo-mo scenes of Belinda canoodling with husband, Morgan Mason.

I GET WEAK
Again directed by Keaton, this time the love interest is model Tony Ward (who later worked with/dated Madonna). Stark monochrome shots capture Carlisle atop a silky backdrop, with singular bold colours accenting specific features (pink for her lips, green for the silk). There is an Art Deco feel in its aesthetic, and a theme of lust with flames representing the pure burning desire for the unreachable.

CIRCLE IN THE SAND
Directed by Peter Care (FYC's *Good Thing*), it features then-cutting-edge effects, as footage of a smouldering Belinda is projected onto sheets suspended across the beach. California's Half Moon Bay provides the setting, reflecting the 'waves crash, don't look back' lyric. It's all very meta with the whole 'picture within a picture' gimmick, plus an opportunity for the obligatory windswept beach scenes.

I FEEL FREE
Compiled from concert footage, it opens in grainy black and white before switching to full colour as the main hook comes in. Interestingly, the promo utilises the live audio, too, rather than the studio version – a feisty performance, yet missing the sharp, innovative production trickery that elevated an otherwise fairly standard cover. Perhaps that decision is a key factor in the single's poor showing in the charts.

WORLD WITHOUT YOU & LOVE NEVER DIES
Evidently the video promo budget had all been spent by this point, because both videos for *World Without You* and *Love Never Dies* are culled from the same concert footage captured during the Good Heavens! Tour in 1988. Retaining the live performances, it's interesting that rather than upping the stakes to capitalise on the early success, Belinda's team dropped it back. It's as if they decided there was no chance of ever topping the ubiquity of *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* so why even bother? However, it is fun to document Carlisle's performance values and tight live band during their imperial pomp. The simple stage backdrop echoes the setting of the album cover – a series of steps leading up to a small globe. A timely reminder, if was ever needed, to book tickets for her Heavenly Hits Tour when it visits the UK later this year.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Almost 40 years on, it remains a fine collection that deserves revisiting. *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* regularly pops up in film and TV. But the weighty album opener is almost too substantial – a star that shines so phenomenally bright, it blinds everything within range. The rest of the record is solid, too, and several of its companions are deserving of more attention.

Heaven On Earth enabled a second bite of the cherry for Carlisle – by her own admission (in various interviews) a rarity, not to be taken for granted. The lead single was nominated for a Grammy, ultimately losing out to Whitney Houston's *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* – not that Carlisle could have too much cause to argue with that.

Heaven On Earth's immediate impact is evident from the line of superstars queuing up to appear on its follow-up, *Runaway Horses*, including Bryan Adams, Steve Lukather and George Harrison.

© Alamy

Following the LP's release, Carlisle embarked on the Good Heavens! Tour in 1988 and sold out Wembley Arena

But even the presence of rock royalty could not make it eclipse its predecessor. *Heaven On Earth* remains Carlisle's commercial peak as a solo star, and produced her last Top 10 US single, although she continued to have Top 10 hits in the UK and other territories.

By and large, there's nothing particularly groundbreaking in the production or song choices, besides perhaps an innovative version of Cream's *I Feel Free*. But the record wins out on its huge hooks, big heart and sheer strength of conviction.

It's an unashamedly mainstream record, yet it retains its integrity. It is Belinda Carlisle's proper 'grown up' record, but – most importantly – she achieves this feat without losing the sense of fun that won everyone over in the first place. ■

Once Upon A Time In California

Belinda Carlisle
Once Upon a Time in California

Featuring ten new tracks, recorded in Los Angeles.

This personal journey is a collection of immaculate cover versions including 'Superstar' (The Carpenters), 'If You Could Read My Mind', (Gordon Lightfoot), 'Time In A Bottle' (Jim Croce), 'The Air That I Breathe' (Albert Hammond) and 'Everybody's Talkin' (Harry Nilsson).

The album is available on CD, digital, Picture Disc LP and on limited edition 'Californian Sunset' coloured vinyl

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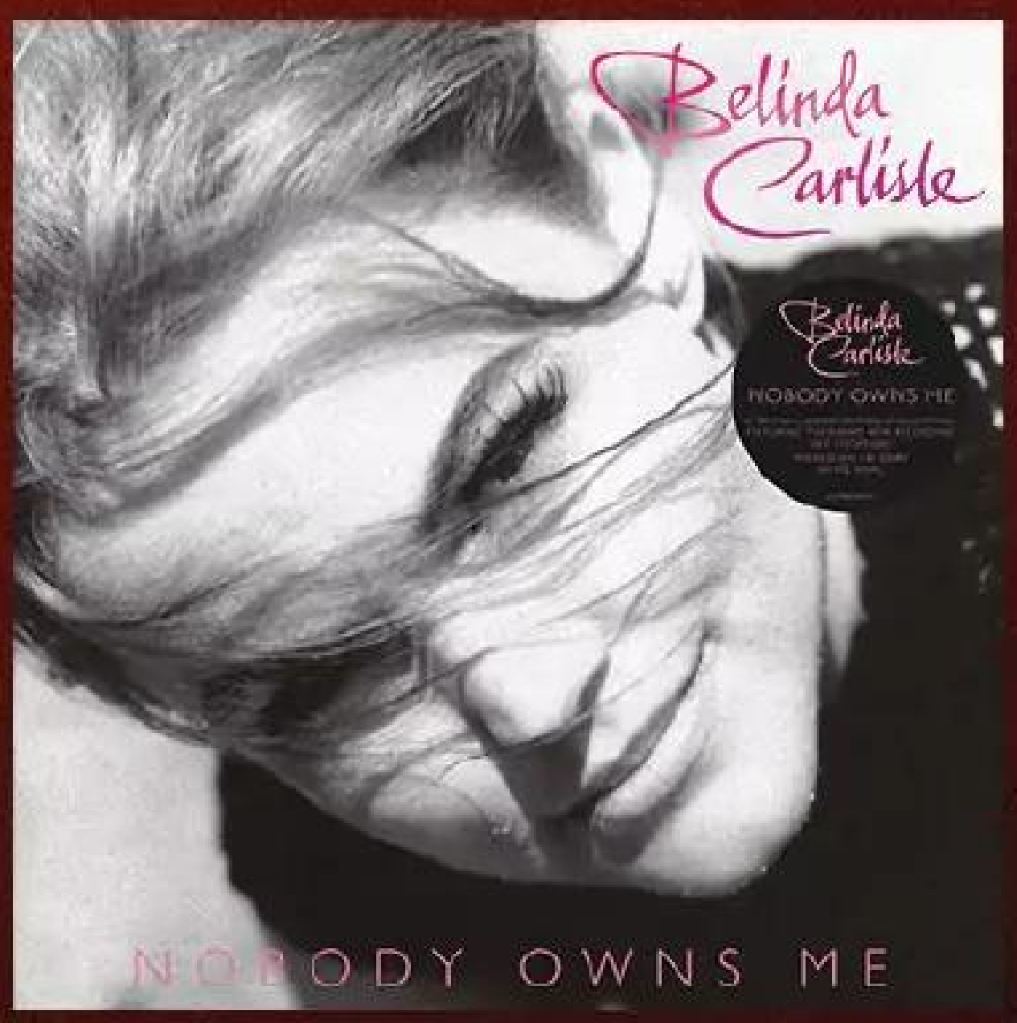
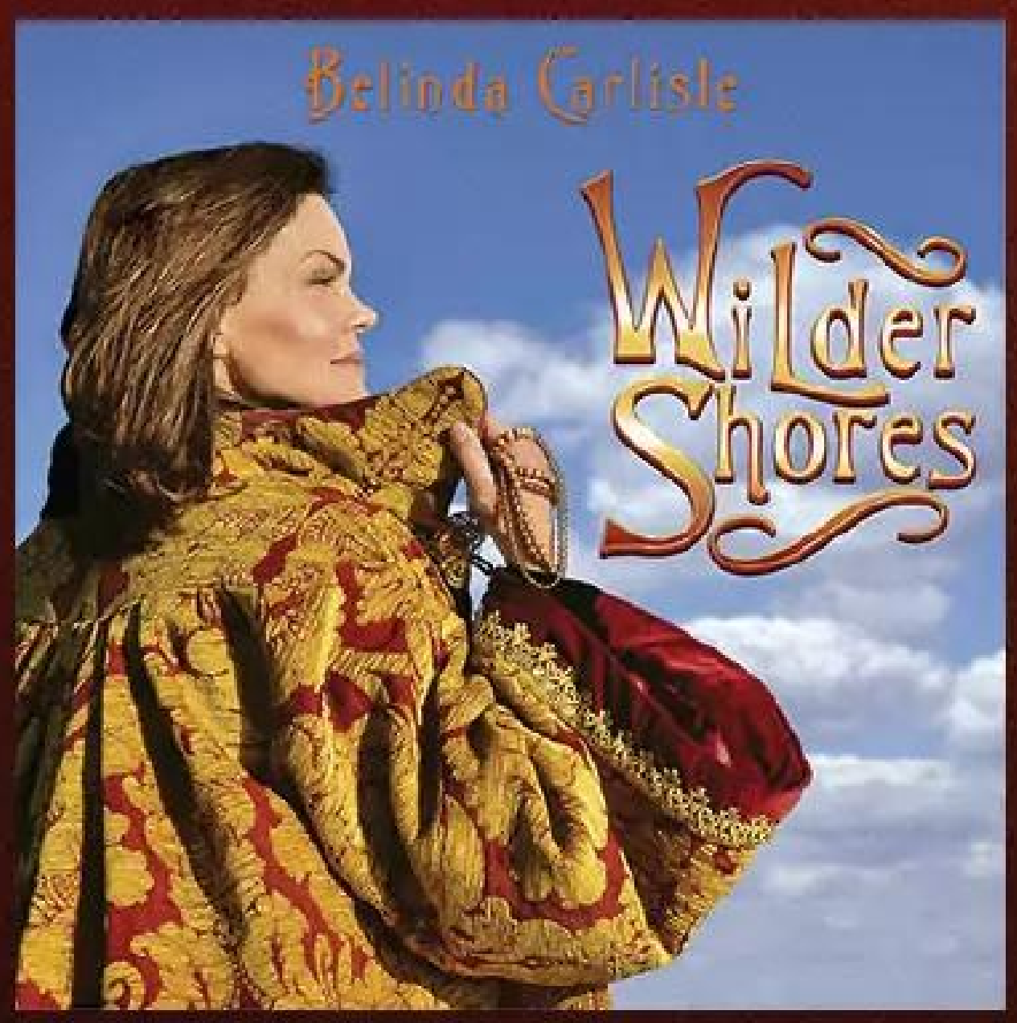

Belinda Carlisle
NOBODY OWNS ME

BELINDA CARLISLE
DECADES VOLUME I


Belinda Carlisle
Wilder Shores

belinda carlisle real
belindacarlislereal
half-speed master

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WIN!

Belinda Carlisle's latest album *Once Upon A Time In California* on CD/LP

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ENTER

Belinda Carlisle
Once Upon a Time in California

Belinda Carlisle's new album, *Once Upon A Time In California*, is a carefully curated salute to her personal education in pop music

L.A. Woman

Belinda Carlisle is revisiting the late-60s and early-70s pop that soundtracked her days growing up in the Golden State for a new 10-song covers album. It's a record that conjures up "bittersweet memories of a California that doesn't really exist anymore," reflects the singer.

ANNIE ZALESKI

Belinda Carlisle came of age in the vibrant Los Angeles punk scene of the late 70s. She briefly drummed for The Germs; bassist Lorna Doom was a high school friend who was into artists like Roxy Music, Queen and the New York Dolls. Not long after, Carlisle co-founded and fronted The Go-Go's, a five-piece that combined nervy punk energy with the melodic sparkle of girl groups and hard-hitting rhythms of surf-rock bands.

But before all this, Carlisle was enthralled by the pop music of the late 60s and early 70s: The Beach Boys' groundbreaking *Pet Sounds*, singles like The 5th Dimension's *Aquarius*, and the eclectic Top 40 AM radio stations KHJ and KRLA in her native southern California.

"I had this best friend, Christina Badala," Carlisle recalls to *Classic Pop* from her current home base of Mexico City. "She lived around the corner, and her mother worked every day. So I would go to her house and we'd just lay in front of the speakers from 9am to when her mom got home at 5.30pm."

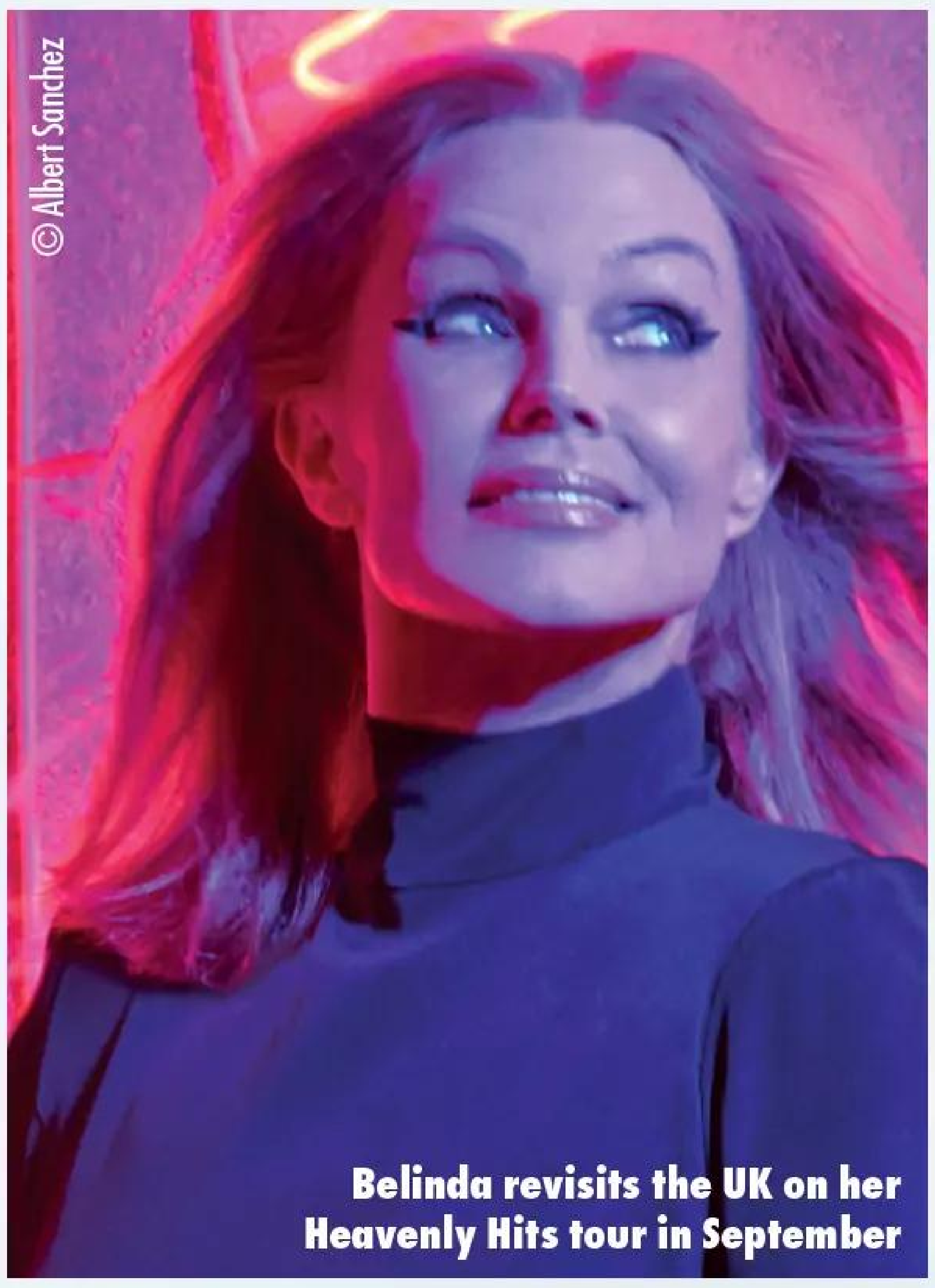
In her solo career, Carlisle has a history of honouring this era of music, having previously released a groovy cover of Cream's *I Feel Free* on 1987's *Heaven On Earth* and takes on classics by Creedence Clearwater Revival and Joni Mitchell. But the new 10-song solo album, *Once Upon A Time In California*, highlights even more of her favourite songs and formative influences, encompassing acts like The Association (*Never My Love*), Jim Croce (*Time In A Bottle*) and Harry Nilsson (*One, Everybody's Talkin'*), as well as classic songwriters Burt Bacharach and Hal David (*Anyone Who Had A Heart*).

"I thought, 'I just want to do an album of the songs that really moved me and really inspired me to be a singer,'" she says. "I grew up before the punk movement. I loved punk and, for me, it was the best thing since sliced bread. The Go-Go's were always very melodic. But songs like the ones here, with lush orchestral productions and arrangements, have always inspired me. My influences are definitely captured in this record."

Carlisle began *Once Upon A Time In California* in 2017. Working from a list of roughly 80 potential songs, she started experimenting in the studio and eliminating those that didn't

Carlisle whittled down the contenders on the new album from an original list of 80 potential songs

© Albert Sanchez



© Albert Sanchez

Belinda revisits the UK on her Heavenly Hits tour in September

work for one reason or another; among those jettisoned were the Bee Gees' *Holiday*, The Turtles' *Happy Together*, and Simon and Garfunkel's *The Sound Of Silence*.

"It wasn't just as simple saying, 'Oh, I'll sing that. I'll sing that,'" she says. "I mean, because there's a lot of songs on the list that I love, but it just didn't suit my voice. And I wasn't going to try to fit my vocal into a song that didn't work for me."

Luckily, some songs were obvious to include on *Once Upon A Time In California,* like her version of Gordon Lightfoot's *If You Could Read My Mind*, which first appeared on a 30th anniversary reissue of 1989's *Runaway Horses* and a cover of The Youngbloods' classic *Get Together* from the 2021 compilation *Nobody Owns Me*.

In 2023, Carlisle also covered *Superstar* with the BBC Concert Orchestra, bringing dashes of grandeur and melancholy to the Bonnie Bramlett/Leon Russell song popularised by the Carpenters.

"I sang that song so many times as a young girl that I just felt like I knew it," she says now. "[But] I dove into the song and what it meant... It's not the sweet, romantic song that I always thought it was growing up. It's about a one-night stand and the guy obviously not calling her and not being in touch. It's sweet – but it's not *that* sweet."

She laughs. "That was really, really fun to sing. I wanted to keep the integrity of the song. I love the arrangement of the Carpenters' [version]. I'm not trying to be Karen Carpenter, and I can keep the integrity [of the song], but put my spin on it and give it a little bit more grit."

Others that made the final cut included Marmalade's *Reflections Of My Life*, a Carlisle childhood favourite that was a UK Top 5 hit for the Scottish collective in 1970. "That was the very last song we tried," she admits. "I thought, 'Well, if it doesn't work, we won't put it on there.' But I thought it actually fit in with the rest. The lyrics are kind of sad, and now singing it as a 66-year-old woman, it takes on a whole other meaning. I thought that song was a perfect way to end the album, if it worked with my voice. And it just happened that it did."

Carlisle also gave special attention to her take on Nilsson's *Everybody's Talkin'*, another song she wasn't sure would work that ended up being an album highlight, thanks to some cinematic orchestral bursts.

"The arrangement is a little bit different than the original," Belinda explains. "And the vocals are different. It's more ethereal. It's still very California, but we took that and almost made it sort of more of a Roy Orbison song and really focused on the layered vocal arrangements, which were really fun and very hard to do."

KEEPING IT FUN

Once Carlisle narrowed down the tunes to record, she settled into the North Hollywood home studio of producer Gabe Lopez, who also worked on her 2017 studio album *Wilder Shores*.

The pair worked in the afternoons ("[Gabe] gets up about noon," she quips. "He is totally nocturnal") in focused sessions that Carlisle says were "a very civilised way of recording."

"We just have a blast," she adds, "I met him through my son [James Duke Mason], and we'd laugh, gossip, mess around a lot, and just have fun. It'd be a drag to go to the studio with somebody who doesn't have a sense of humour and you can't feel comfortable around. We have the same

> "The whole thing with pop music is that people are quick to diss it or write it off. You know, writing a great pop song is not an easy thing, and one that endures, it has to be great."

pop sensibilities. It was an easy working environment and easy approach to the tracks, which I think is reflected in the recording.”

The results are uniformly elegant, with string flourishes and lush, modern production cushioning her sophisticated vocals. Carlisle sounds fantastic and is clearly relishing interpreting these songs: belting out *Anyone Who Had A Heart* with gusto; bringing desperate tenderness to *If You Could Read My Mind*; infusing *Never My Love* with dreamy pop vibes; and adding dramatic heft to Albert Hammond’s *The Air That I Breathe*.

For as moving as the album turned out, Carlisle admits recording these older songs conjured “bittersweet memories of a California that doesn’t really exist anymore,” she says. “It’s still a special place, but it’s nothing like it was when I was growing up. The world was a lot less complicated.”

Yet *Once Upon A Time In California* also gave her a “brand new appreciation” for not just the songs, but also the songwriters behind them. “The whole thing with pop music is that people are quick to diss it or write it off,” she says. “You know, writing a great pop song is not an easy thing, and one that endures, it has to be great.”

And Carlisle also gleaned greater insights into how these songs influenced her as a musician and a performer. “[They] were the ones that definitely shaped me. Definitely shaped my choices – the way that I sing, the way that I listen to melody, the way that I listen to arrangements,” she explains.

“It’s taught me a *lot* about arranging. It’s been an influence all these years, and I sort of knew it, but didn’t realise it as much until I actually got to sing the songs.

“These songs really informed my taste of the [material] that I picked for myself through the years,” she adds. “Especially when I was lucky to work with Rick Nowels on *Heaven On Earth*. And it was like, ‘Oh, my God, he *gets* it.’ He grew up in California, too, so he was informed by the same sort of radio. He totally understood that music from that period, and loved it – and he understood me, too. I was really lucky to be a muse of somebody who really took all those influences and kept them in mind when he was writing his hits.”

© Albert Sanchez

The new album’s producer Gabe Lopez also helmed Carlisle’s eighth solo LP, 2017’s *Wilder Shores*

Hanging out with Harry

Given that Carlisle has been in the music industry for more than 40 years, it’s perhaps surprising that she’s never encountered most of the artists she covers on *Once Upon A Time In California* in person – with one exception being the late Harry Nilsson (pictured), who “was a great, kind man,” she says. “I met him quite a few times through the years and hung out with him a few evenings when my husband had a restaurant. I think he would really appreciate my take on those two songs [of his included on the new album].”

In the early days of The Go-Go’s, she also crossed paths with Richard Carpenter in the lot of A&M Records in Los Angeles. (The band was signed to I.R.S. Records, a label distributed by A&M.)

“We would always see [him] pull up in his Mercedes and go, ‘Oh! There’s Richard Carpenter!’” Carlisle recalls. The decorated composer also figures in another vivid memory she recalls from that time: One of the studios had a big photograph of the Carpenters up on the wall, and a band “drew moustaches and beards on both Karen and Richard,” Carlisle says. “It’s so juvenile, but it’s kind of funny. And [Richard] had a *fit*. [A&M label bosses] Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss and all those guys were trying to figure out who the culprit was.” Carlisle has her suspicions on which band defaced the photograph, though she doesn’t name names – and stresses that it *wasn’t* The Go-Go’s...

WINDING DOWN

Carlisle has a five-date UK Heavenly Hits Tour scheduled for September and some additional shows at the end of the year, but plans to take it easy after that in the near future. “I’m going to take, I think, next year completely off and then decide what I want to do,” she says. “I consider myself kind of in semi-retirement, because I don’t really want to tour that much anymore. But I love going into the studio; I think I’ll always do that.”

However, in the meantime she’s fresh off a well-received spring 2025 mini-tour with The Go-Go’s that found the band generating enormous goodwill thanks to fiery club shows and sets at festivals including Coachella and Cruel World. “Everybody has their own lives going on but we put everything aside and for two months got to work together,” she says. “And it was a lot of fun. It was a blast. People had so much, like you said, goodwill. They wanted us to succeed, and I think we did. The response was amazing.”

Carlisle singles out the Coachella performances as a highlight; among other things, The Go-Go’s performed their 1984 hit *Head Over Heels* with Green Day’s Billie Joe Armstrong. “I think we made some new fans,” she says. “The demographic out there was all over the place. And I loved seeing teenagers singing the words to the songs, which is amazing to me.”

Classic Pop then observes what a lovely full-circle moment it is for Carlisle to be releasing *Once Upon A Time In California*, given that she herself is an influential icon that generations of music fans grew up listening to on the radio. “It is totally a full-circle moment,” she agrees. “Just to look out and to know that a lot of the songs that I’ve done in my career, Go-Go’s and solo, have had that same effect the music I listened to every single day had on me... And I know that feeling. It’s a magical feeling.” ■

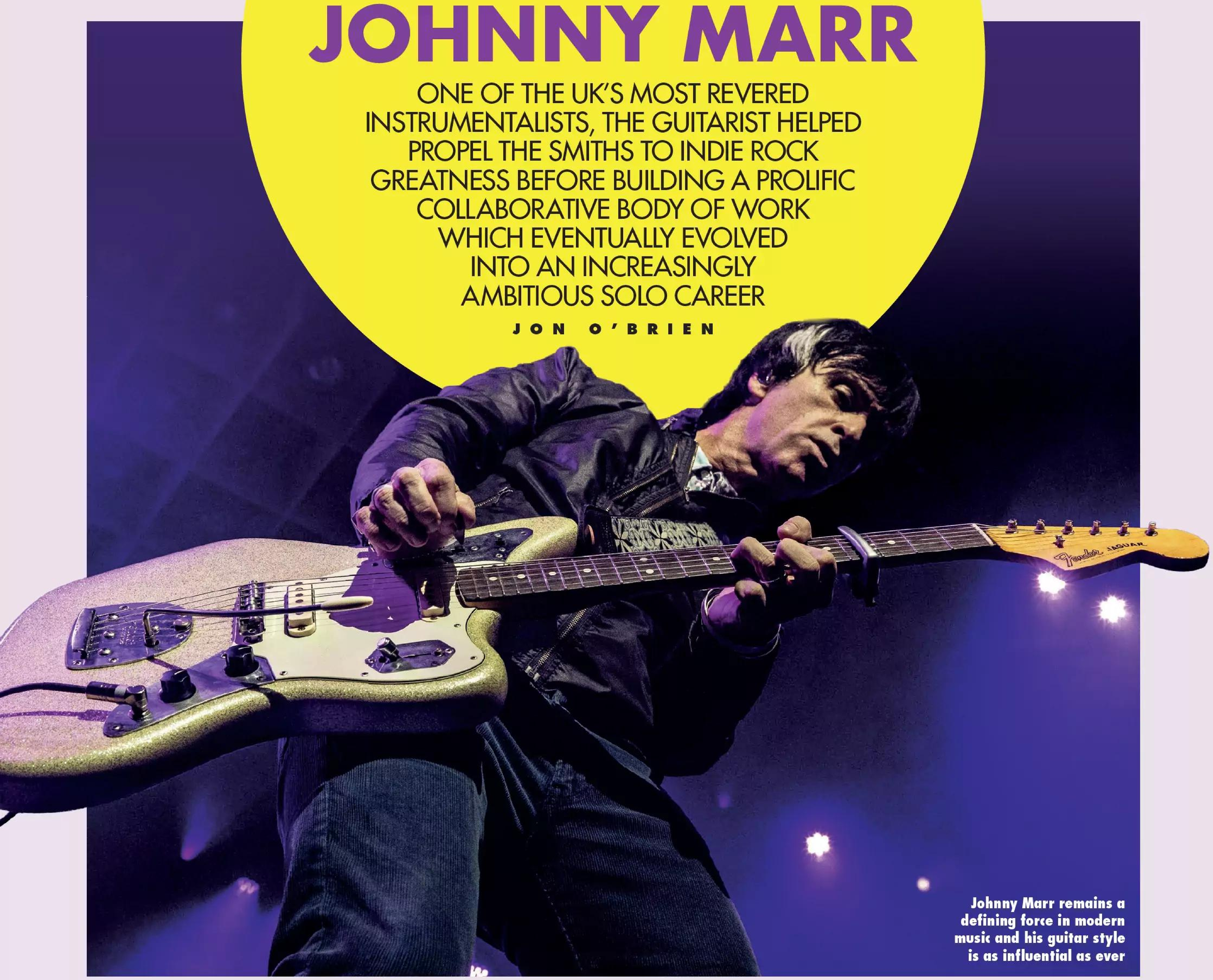
- ***Once Upon A Time In California* is released on 29 August via Demon and will be reviewed in our next issue**

ALBUM BY ALBUM

JOHNNY MARR

ONE OF THE UK'S MOST REVERED INSTRUMENTALISTS, THE GUITARIST HELPED PROPEL THE SMITHS TO INDIE ROCK GREATNESS BEFORE BUILDING A PROLIFIC COLLABORATIVE BODY OF WORK WHICH EVENTUALLY EVOLVED INTO AN INCREASINGLY AMBITIOUS SOLO CAREER

JON O'BRIEN



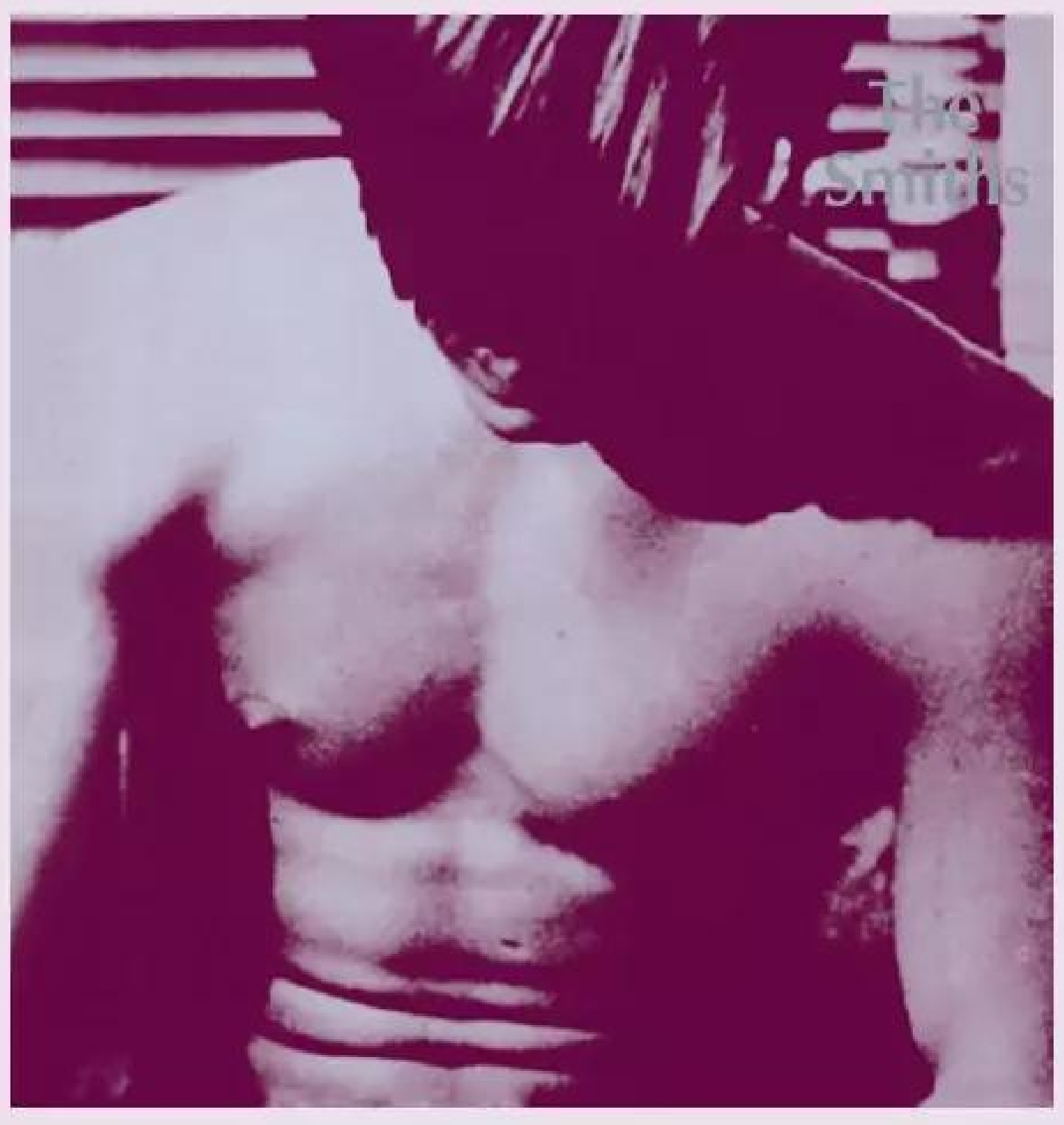
Johnny Marr remains a defining force in modern music and his guitar style is as influential as ever

Six years after first meeting at a Patti Smith gig, Johnny Marr and Morrissey debuted the songwriting partnership that many 80s indie fans consider to be akin to Lennon and McCartney's. And on a record which practically reinvented the traditional guitar band, too.

However, not everyone saw The Smiths' potential. Manchester's finest, who, of course, also included bassist Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce, were turned down by both EMI and Factory Records. And Geoff Travis, boss of their home label Rough Trade, only agreed to listen to their demo once Marr pinned him down to a swivel chair.

The recording of their self-titled debut wasn't exactly plain sailing either. Early sessions produced by The Teardrop Explodes' guitarist Troy Tate were abandoned, with both the quartet and the record company unhappy at their unpolished nature.

Morrissey also wanted to scrap the finished product overseen by ex-Roxy Music bassist John Porter. Not that he made such concerns public, claiming to *Melody Maker* that "I am ready to be burned at the stake in total defence of it." Marr soon proved he could be just as self-aggrandising, too, bragging to *The Face* that, "For a lot of people, we're the event of the decade."



To be fair, that was no doubt true for those transfixed by Morrissey's iconic gladioli-waving performance on *Top Of The Pops*: in a sign of things to come, *This Charming Man* didn't get a studio album home. And while *The Smiths* is regarded as the least essential of the group's four studio LPs, there's still plenty to justify such hype.

Opener *Reel Around The Fountain*, a deeply melancholic six-minute tale of a formative sexual encounter steeped in ambiguity, perfectly set the tone for the group's entire career.

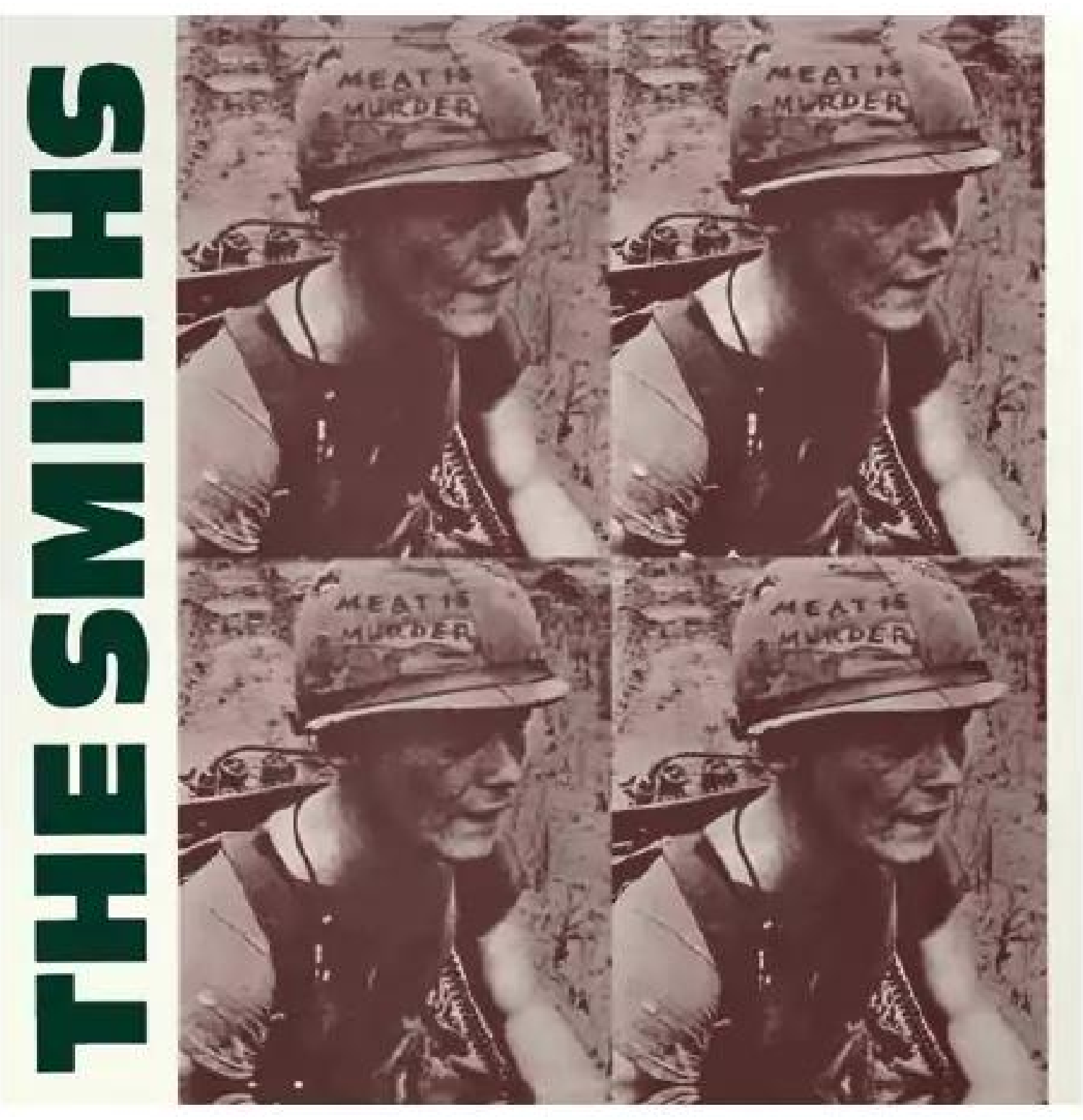
Home to one of their most iconic lines ("Oh, Manchester, so much to answer for"), the controversial *Suffer Little Children* is a haunting portrait of the Moors murders which proved The Smiths were willing to confront subjects their peers wouldn't even dare tiptoe around.

Referencing everything from Leonard Cohen to kitchen sink drama *A Taste Of Honey*, debut single *Hand In Glove* highlighted how they were also drawing cultural influences from a completely different well.

While Morrissey's disaffected vocals and lyrical idiosyncrasies inevitably took centre stage, Marr is just as integral to the record, his shimmering guitar showcasing an incomparable understanding of melody and space. It would only get more brilliantly subversive.

THE SMITHS

Released 1984
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.150



"It felt like all the grown ups had left us and let us get along with doing our thing on our own," Marr later told Hotpress about The Smiths' entirely self-produced second studio album. The fact that *Meat Is Murder* knocked Springsteen's *Born In The U.S.A.* off the UK No.1 spot proved they were even more effective when masters of their own destiny.

Of course, the Mancunians did draw upon the engineering talents of Stephen Street, cementing a working relationship that would extend into Morrissey's solo career. But its nine songs, the majority of which originated in their guitarist's Earl's Court flat, is undeniably the sound of a band unwilling to compromise.

Just listen to the deeply oppressive title track, a six-minute militant pro-vegetarianism anthem bookended by a disturbing cacophony of noises which appear to stem from an abattoir. It's little wonder that the indie generation were forever scared off their festively sliced turkey.

Nowhere Fast foreshadows the distaste for the royals that would define studio album number three, while opener *The Headmaster Ritual* is a scathing critique of England's education system ("Belligerent ghouls run Manchester schools") which showed that even with their US profile growing, The Smiths were still determined to keep things local.

As always, Marr makes his presence heard, kicking off the latter with a kinetic dual-Rickenbacker riff self-described as the missing link between MC5 and Joni Mitchell.

Elsewhere, he throws things back to glam's heyday on the propulsive *What She Said*, serves up the kind of slinky licks that Chic would be proud of on corporal punishment diatribe *Barbarism Begins At Home* and channels the hip-swivelling rockabilly of vintage Elvis on *Rusholme Ruffians*, a meditation on teenage violence which also no doubt deterred the indie generation from ever stepping foot inside a funfair, too.

Marr still gets to play the king of jangle to Morrissey's master of malaise, none more so than on *I Want The One I Can't Have*, a tale of unrequited love which eschews the usual cynicism for something approaching genuine yearn ("A double bed and a stalwart lover for sure/ These are the riches of the poor"). The group's third release in just under a year could have run the risk of overkill. Instead, it left their fans wanting even more.

MARR STILL GETS TO PLAY THE KING OF JANGLE TO MORRISSEY'S MASTER OF MALAISE

MEAT IS MURDER

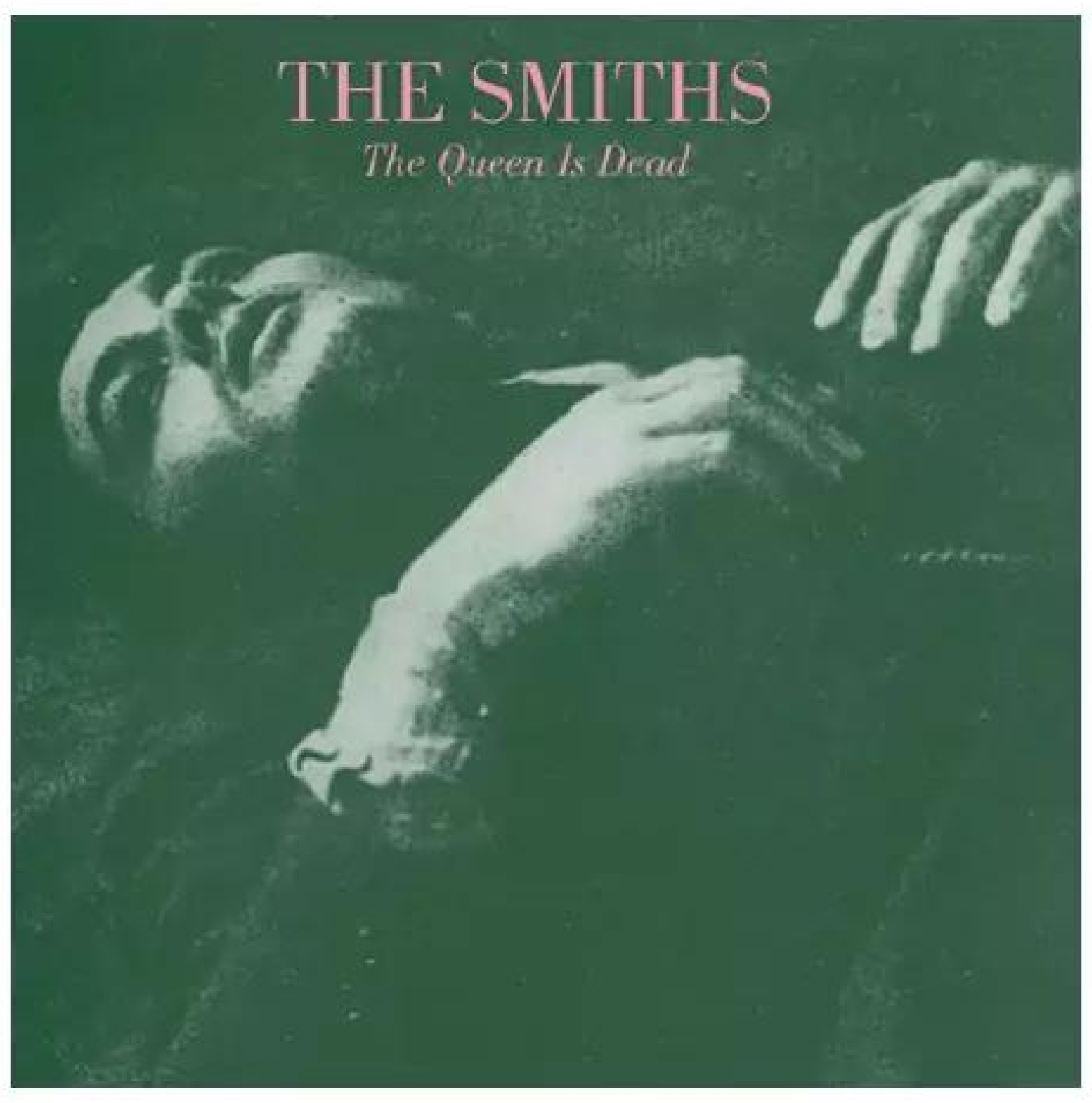
Released 1985
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.1 US No.110

Of course, fans of The Smiths had to wait a little longer than expected for studio LP number three: a dispute between the band and their Rough Trade label resulted in a nine-month gap between first taster *The Boy With The Thorn In His Side* and its parent album.

The Queen Is Dead alludes to this spat on *Frankly, Mr. Shankly,* a jaunty potshot at label boss Geoff Travis ("You are a flatulent pain in the arse") which briefly suggested that Morrissey had swapped his witty literate barbs for juvenile playground insults.

The mainstream media also get it in the neck on *Bigmouth Strikes Again*, a Rolling Stones-inspired display of self-awareness. Likewise, the royal family on the thunderous title track in which pop's proudest anti-monarchist lives out his Buckingham Palace-trespassing fantasy.

Largely conceived at Marr's new Bowdon home, *The Queen Is Dead* isn't purely a musical vendetta, though.



Indeed, the Mancunians get relatively frivolous on cross-dressing character study *Vicar In A Tutu* and questionably themed closer *Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others*.

Morrissey's uncanny ability to veer from the ridiculous to the sublime is also showcased on *I Know It's Over*, one of his more beautifully melancholic displays of abject misery, and *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out*, a stunning tragi-romance that Marr described to *Select* as "the best song I'd ever heard."

The guitarist is on sparkling musical form himself, whether it's creating the latter's haunting synth-string section, channelling The Stooges on *Never Had No One Ever* or soundtracking his bandmate's Oscar Wilde-referencing thoughts on plagiarism with a simple yet deeply wistful riff on the famously misspelled *Cemetry Gates*.

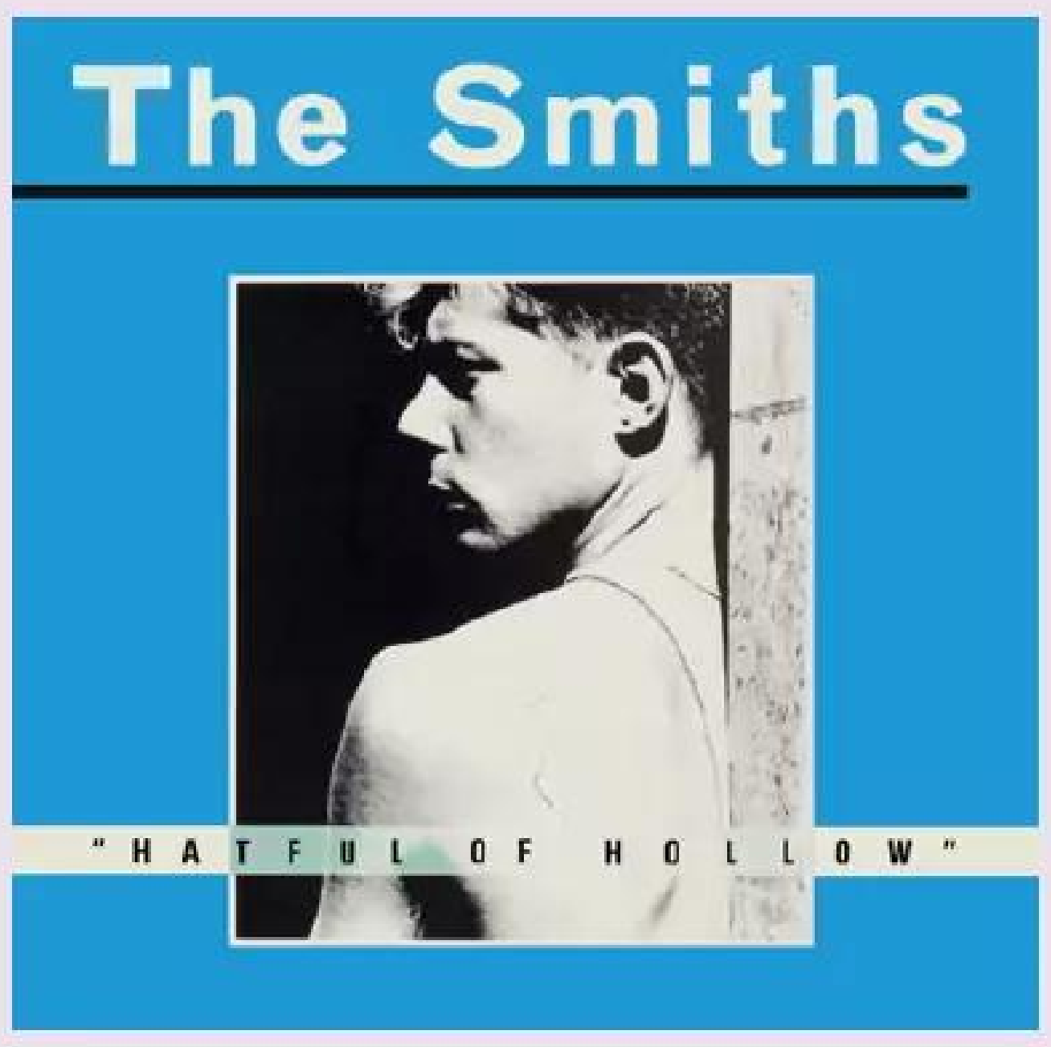
"You progress only when you wonder if an abnormally scientific genius would approve – and this is the leap The Smiths took with *The Queen Is Dead*," Moz remarked in the liner notes for its 2017 reissue.

It's one of his few latter-day statements that no one can take umbrage with.

MARR DESCRIBED *THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT* AS THE BEST SONG HE'D EVER HEARD

THE QUEEN IS DEAD

Released 1986
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.70



Although only issued nine months after their debut, *Hatful Of Hollow* already resembled an alternative Greatest Hits, thanks to the four classic singles which never made it onto a studio effort.

Musical marriage deterrent *William, It Was Really Nothing, Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now* (remarkably, the first of only three occasions that The Smiths entered the UK Top 10) and the glorious happy-sad jangle pop of *This Charming Man* have all deservedly become part of indie folklore since.

But it's unarguably *How Soon Is Now?* that's become widely accepted as their finest hour, with Marr's chugging tremolo and widescreen slide guitars majestically underpinning Moz's mockery of teen angst.

Elsewhere, there's a collection of B-sides (including *Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want*) and an alternative mix of their debut single *Hand In Glove.* The 10 recordings taken from BBC Radio 1 sessions with John Peel and David Jensen, including the otherwise unreleased *This Night Has Opened My Eyes*, hint at what the Tate-produced debut might have sounded like.

The Smiths, or rather the group's labels, became famous for milking their slim back catalogue. But *Hatful Of Hollow* is one of the few compilations which justifies its existence.

HATFUL OF HOLLOW

Released 1984
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.7 SWE No.28

THE SMITHS THE WORLD WON'T LISTEN

The UK alternative to North America's more expansive *Louder Than Bombs, The World Won't Listen* handily gave all The Smiths' one-off singles and the pick of their B-sides from 1985-87 a permanent home. And as with the similarly themed *Hatful Of Hollow*, the set boasts some of the Mancs' finest moments.

Produced entirely by Marr in a band first, *Shoplifters Of The World Unite* incurred the wrath of the nation's supermarket bosses in the form of a reverb-drenched call to arms which evoked classic T-Rex. Reportedly inspired by Steve Wright's playing of Wham! immediately after a Chernobyl news report, *Panic* birthed the iconic line "Hang the DJ."

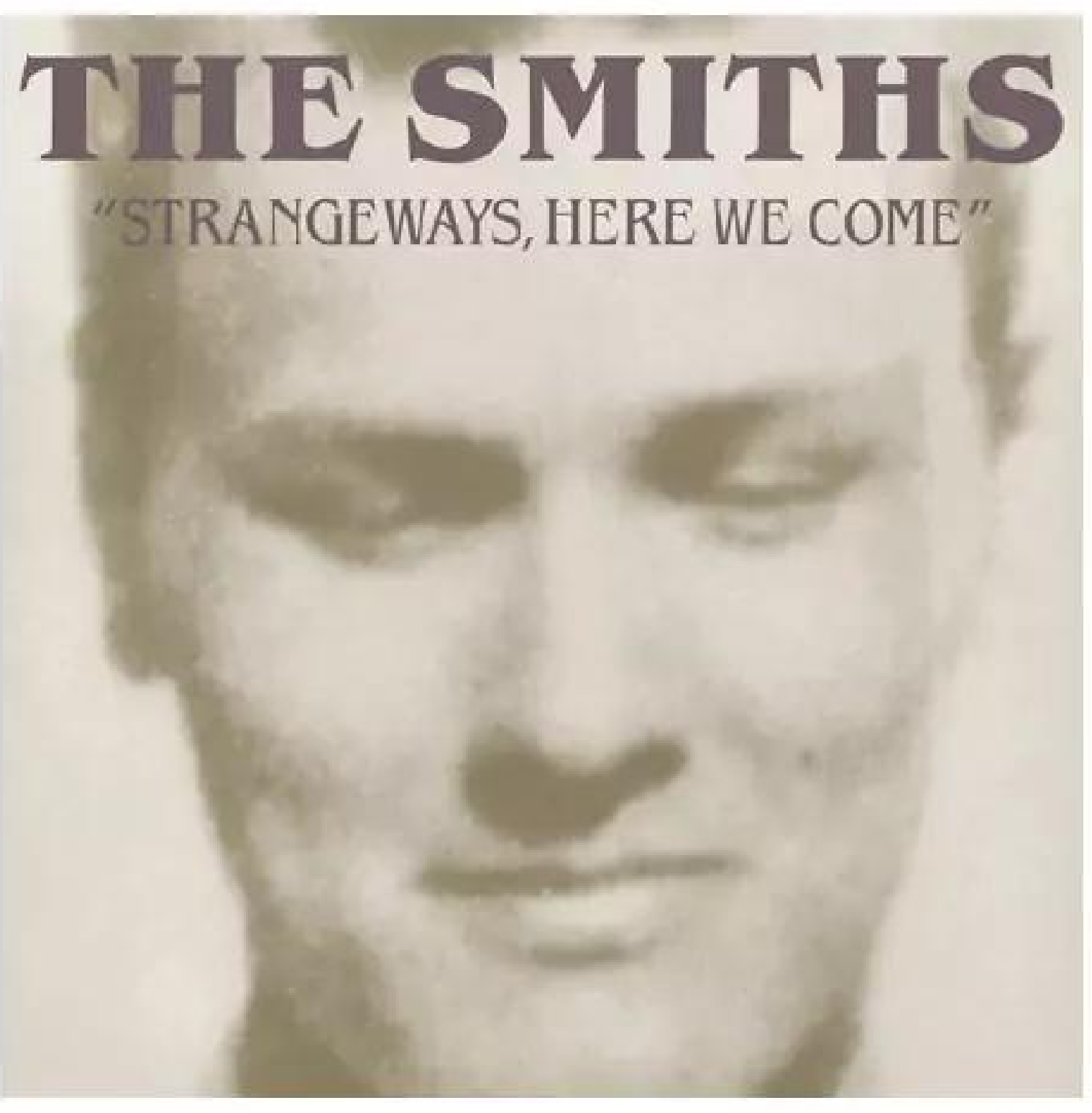
While clocking in at just over two minutes *Shakespeare's Sister* is arguably their punchiest single, an audacious blend of Spaghetti Western twangs, barroom piano and withering putdowns about the validity of acoustic guitarists.

Of course, the holy grail for The Smiths acolytes was the previously unreleased *You Just Haven't Earned It Yet, Baby*, another record company tirade later transformed into a glorious burst of power pop on Kirsty MacColl's second studio album, *Kite*.

Perhaps unnecessary at the time, *The World Won't Listen* now serves as a vital document of the band's in-between days.

THE WORLD WON'T LISTEN

Released 1987
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.2 SWE No.19



Although there'd been plenty of upheaval before heading into the studio – Rourke was temporarily dismissed and fifth member Craig Gannon barely lasted nine months – the sessions for The Smiths' fourth studio LP ran pretty smoothly. Joyce even told the BBC it was "a great experience." However, by the time it hit the shelves in September 1987, indie pop's biggest heroes had split.

Musical differences was the general party line, with Marr becoming exasperated at Morrissey's choice of covers – Cilla Black's *Work Is A Four-Letter Word* apparently the final straw.

Unexpected swansong *Strangeways, Here We Come* strongly hints at a need to distance himself from The Smiths' "jingle-jangle" sound, too.

The creeping ska of opener *A Rush And A Push And The Land Is Ours* remarkably doesn't feature a single guitar.

In stark contrast, the gloriously titled *Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before* contains Marr's first ever solo. And on closer *I Won't Share You*, his most notable contribution is on a newly discovered autoharp.

Yet, serving as co-producer alongside a promoted Street, Moz also seemed to be on the same page, taking to the piano himself on the fatalistic *Death Of A Disco Dancer* and ignoring Joyce and Rourke's disdain over the use of a drum machine on the Bowie-esque *I Started Something I Couldn't Finish*.

He even agreed with Marr, that their unexpected swansong is their true magnum opus. Whatever the reason for their premature split, *Strangeways* ensured that both figureheads went out with a bang.

Paint A Vulgar Picture proved no one could skewer the music industry sharper than Moz ("Re-issue, re-package, re-package/ Re-evaluate the songs," he sings, foreshadowing WEA's future handling of their works in the process).

While flitting from bright and breezy (*Girlfriend In A Coma*) to achingly sad (*Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me*), Marr's guitarwork is as masterful as ever.

The Smiths' story may have been short-lived, but their legacy remains never-ending.

> FLITTING FROM BRIGHT AND BREEZY TO ACHINGLY SAD, MARR'S GUITARWORK IS AS MASTERFUL AS EVER

STRANGEWAYS, HERE WE COME

Released 1987
Label Rough Trade
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.55

After short stints with The Pretenders and The The as well as guest appearances playing for Kirsty MacColl and Talking Heads, Marr formed a supergroup with another Mancunian hero. "A post-industrial doom merchant who wore jackboots," had been his first impression of New Order's Bernard Sumner back in the early 80s. "A stuck-up little twat who lived in Altrincham" was how he was viewed in return. But luckily, after working together on Quando Quango's one-album wonder *Pigs + Battleships*, the pair realised they'd been more judgemental than a Morrissey memoir.

With The Smiths disbanded and Sumner struggling with an eventually shelved solo album designed to show his bandmates the merits of programmed synths, the stars aligned for a collaborative effort. Not that they initially shouted about it from the rooftops. Concerned about their reputations preceding them, they'd planned to debut Electronic with various white label releases.

electronic

Of course, word had already got out long before first single *Getting Away With It* became an instant classic. Also featuring ABC's David Palmer, The Art Of Noise's Anne Dudley and the unmistakable tones of PSB's Neil Tennant, the all-star line-up combined airy synth-pop with a delicious skewering of a certain miserabilist's persona ("I've been walking in the rain just to get wet on purpose").

The No.12 hit doesn't actually appear on the LP, but there are still plenty of other gems where that came from: Top 10 chart infiltrator *Get The Message* bridges the gap between their two bands even more effectively, its jangly guitars and emphatic beats complemented by a powerful vocal coda from Primal Scream regular Denise Johnson. "The best song I've written," Marr later claimed to the BBC.

The Patience Of A Saint also utilises Tennant for a sardonic duet ("Why should I care? I'd rather watch drying paint") which recalls the blissed-out house of The Beloved.

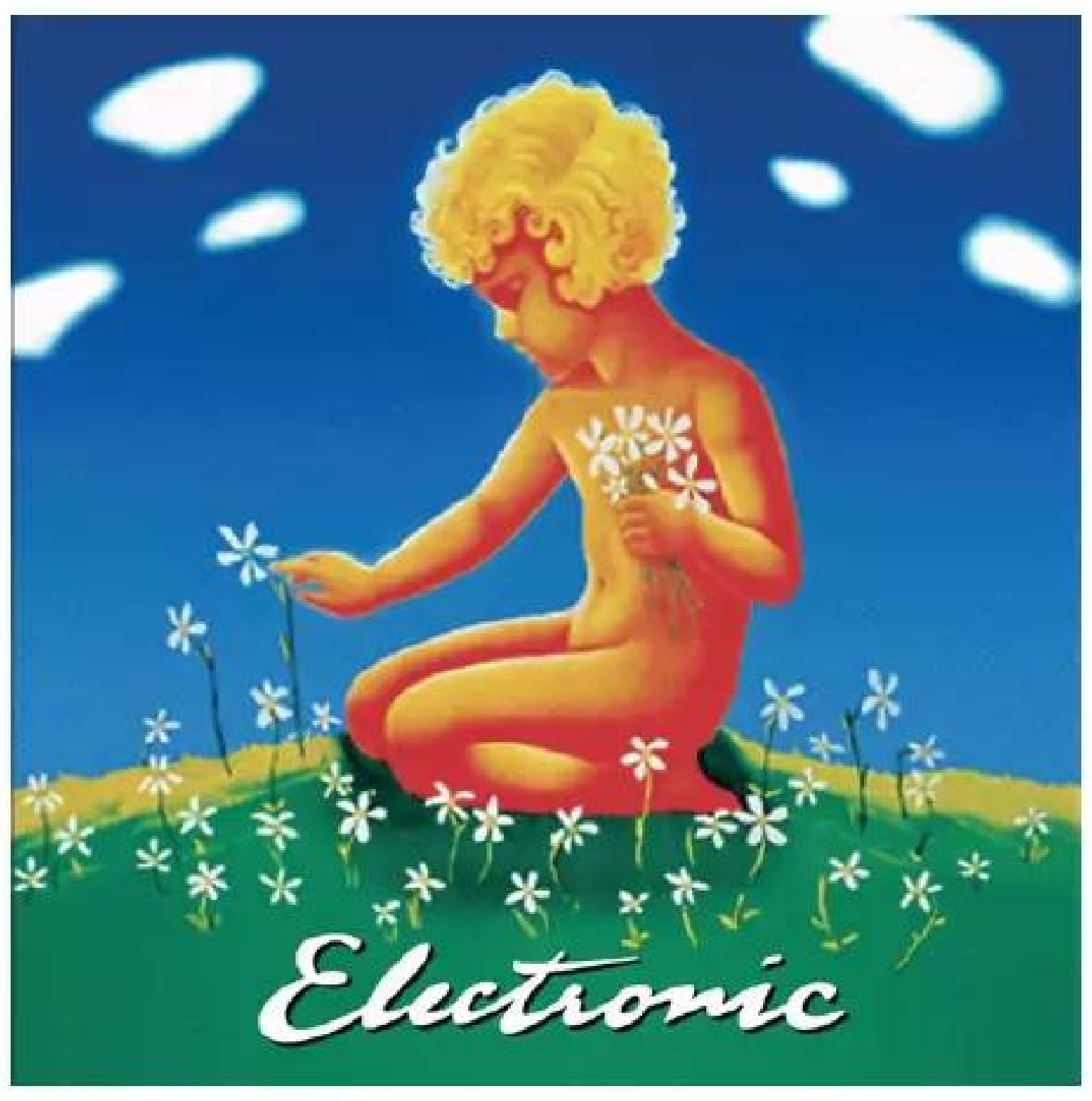
The dancefloor-friendly album is bookended by two rebuttals to the criminalising of rave, with opener *Idiot Country* suggesting that Sumner had taken rapping advice from John Barnes and closer *Feel Every Beat* offering a welcome sense of hope.

With Factory Records folding a year later, *Electronic* is perhaps its last truly essential release.

> WITH FACTORY RECORDS FOLDING A YEAR LATER, *ELECTRONIC* IS PERHAPS ITS LAST TRULY ESSENTIAL RELEASE

ELECTRONIC

Released 1991
Label Factory
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.109



Electronic opened up their supergroup to another bona fide legend on their aptly titled difficult second album. Indeed, the one and only Karl Bartos, a man who tore up the contemporary pop playbook as one-quarter of Düsseldorf revolutionaries Kraftwerk, performed on all 13 tracks and co-wrote six. So it's something of a surprise that *Raise The Pressure* is less synthier than its predecessor.

The German, who was invited to collaborate via the very 90s method of fax, still makes his presence heard. See the flickering electronic workout of *Dark Angel*, the synth-funk leanings of the autobiographical *Second Nature* and acidic squelches that permeate *Until The End Of Time*, the latter perhaps the closest the duo ventured into the kind of warehouse rave their debut seemed determined to protect.

But released smack bang in the middle of Britpop's heyday, an era when anything outside the conventional meat and potato guitar band was viewed with the utmost suspicion, *Raise The Pressure* also appears to suffer something of an identity crisis.

"We were subconsciously aware of the attention we were getting as Johnny Marr and Bernard Sumner, 'formerly of' The Smiths and New Order," the latter admitted to website This Swirling Sphere in 1999.

"We, in turn, paid too much attention to making the record and took too long doing it."

That no doubt explains why the album is at times a little too overproduced and why instead of looking forward, it appears to be more comfortable glancing back. Indeed, *For You*, *Out Of My League* and *One Day* all mine the same kind of driving pop rock which had defined New Order's *Republic* three years earlier.

While there's little of The Smiths' jingle-jangle, Marr's riffs are a lot more prevalent, too. Of course, sticking to what you know is hardly an ill-advised approach. *Forbidden City*, a poignant tale of a turbulent father-son relationship, is up there with the duo's best. But rather aptly considering it arrived in the wake of Euro 96, it's undoubtedly an album of two halves.

INSTEAD OF LOOKING FORWARD, THE ALBUM APPEARS TO BE MORE COMFORTABLE GLANCING BACK

RAISE THE PRESSURE

Released 1996
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.8 US No.143

Electronic bookended the 90s with their third, and sadly final, album, a record which, despite the presence of pioneering electro producer Arthur Baker, veers further toward Marr's wheelhouse than his partner in crime's and yet there are still flashes of electronic brilliance.

Opening track *Make It Happen* is a seven-and-a-half-minute dancefloor epic which channels the thrilling big beat of The Chemical Brothers (who Sumner would work with later that same year) before drifting off into the night with a dreamlike acoustic outro.

The title track boasts an anthemic synth hook which recalls Felix's club classic *Don't You Want Me*.

And alongside a scathing attack on an egomaniac who may or may not be a certain former bandmate ("You may be a star in your own mind but you're greatly deluded in mine"), *Prodigal Son* initially evokes the claustrophobic dub of Massive Attack's *Mezzanine*.

Electronic 01:01:52 Make it happen Haze Vivid Breakdown Can't find my way home Twisted Tenderness Like no other Late at night Prodigal son When she's gone Flicker.

But elsewhere, and perhaps as a result of inviting Doves' frontman Jimi Goodwin and Black Grape drummer Ged Lynch into the studio fold, *Twisted Tenderness* is more interested in rocking out. Bitter kiss-off *Vivid* ("Have you a reason to behave like this/ Maybe you need a psychoanalyst?") is an infectious piece of post-Britpop which also allows Marr to showcase his skills on the harmonica.

The guitar hero also gets plenty of opportunities to do his more familiar thing on the squalling psych-rock of *Breakdown* and dynamic indie pop of *Like No Other*. And despite Sumner's initial reservations ("I was a bit iffy about doing it," he told This Swirling Sphere), the pair eventually accepted Baker's idea of covering Blind Faith's 1969 folk classic *Can't Find My Way Home*.

However, the fact that a band who'd once prided themselves on marrying guitars and synths were now embracing such classicism perhaps justifies their decision in calling it a day. "As Bernard's friend, I could see New Order needed to resume," Marr later told Guitar.com, a selfless act which Sumner didn't let go to waste. Apart from a 2006 retrospective and a one-off reunion performance of *Getting Away With It* at Jodrell Bank seven years later, Electronic have remained dormant ever since.

MAKE IT HAPPEN IS A DANCEFLOOR EPIC WHICH CHANNELS THE THRILLING BIG BEAT OF THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

TWISTED TENDERNESS

Released 1999
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.9 AUS No.78

Johnny Marr
+ the HEALERS
BOOMSLANG

Having made his debut with The Smiths a full 20 years earlier, and with Morrissey about to launch his career-rejuvenating seventh solo effort, Marr decided it was about time he took the mic himself. Accompanied by The Healers, a band featuring the likes of future Oasis and The Who drummer Zak Starkey and Kula Shaker bassist Alonza Bevan, *Boomslang* proved that although Marr could undeniably hold a tune, his voice wasn't quite yet distinctive enough to take centre stage.

Indeed, on the baggy funk of *Down On The Corner*, Marr closely resembles The Charlatans' Tim Burgess, while perhaps inspired by his work on Oasis' *Heathen Chemistry*, there are also echoes of Liam Gallagher's swagger throughout. Lyrically, however, things are unfortunately a little more Noel-esque, with *Long Gone* suggesting Marr relied on his rhyming dictionary a little too heavily ("I'm sinking like a stone/ Rolling in the foam/ Someone get me home!")

The Eastern-tinged psychedelia of opener *The Last Ride*, Wild West rockabilly of *Need It* and scuzzed-up blues of *InBetweens* showed that Marr was still very much an undisputed guitar hero.

However, while no disgrace, *Boomslang* sounds like a supporting player cosplaying as leading man.

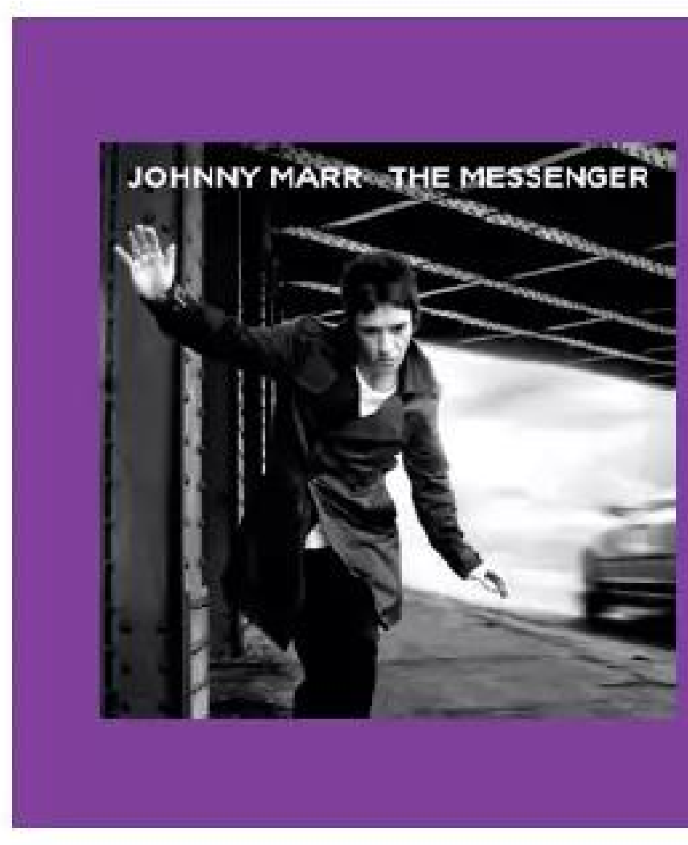
BOOMSLANG

Released 2003
Label Artsdirect/ iMusic
Chart Position
UK No.34
(2024 Reissue)

Following a decade of odd-jobbing including guesting on records by John Frusciante and Crowded House, working on the score for Christopher Nolan's mindbender *Inception* and achieving his first ever US No.1 as a full-time member of Modest Mouse, Marr finally released his solo debut proper.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *The Messenger* is heavily informed by his journeyman career. Lead single *Upstarts* is cut from the same primitive power pop cloth as The Cribs, the Yorkshire trio he briefly made a quartet. *New Town Velocity* could be mistaken for latter-day Electronic, with Marr's somnambulistic vocal also sounding suspiciously like Sumner's. Meanwhile *European Me* appears to borrow the Elvis-inspired riff from The Smiths' *Rusholme Ruffians*.

There's nothing here to match Marr's career highs, but the stomping Northern Soul of opener *The Right Thing Right* and new wave pop of *The Crack Up* would merit a low-down placing on a Best Of. And although the guitarist may not be the most compelling lead singer, *The Messenger* proved he'd evolved as a lyricist, with *I Want The Heartbeat* satirising man's over-reliance on technology and *Generate! Generate!* even serving up a Descartes-quoting pun that Moz would be proud of. File under inessential but promising.



THE MESSENGER

Released 2013
Label Warner Bros
Chart Position UK No.10

"I always liked bands' second albums," Marr told *Rolling Stone* ahead of his 2014 own, citing Wire, Talking Heads and Buzzcocks as prime examples. Once again co-produced with James Doviak, *Playland* never comes close to reaching such heights, but as with all of Marr's solo endeavours, it doesn't detract from his legacy either.

In fact, lead single *Easy Money*, a funk punk anthem decrying societal greed, is one of the catchiest songs he's ever put his name to.

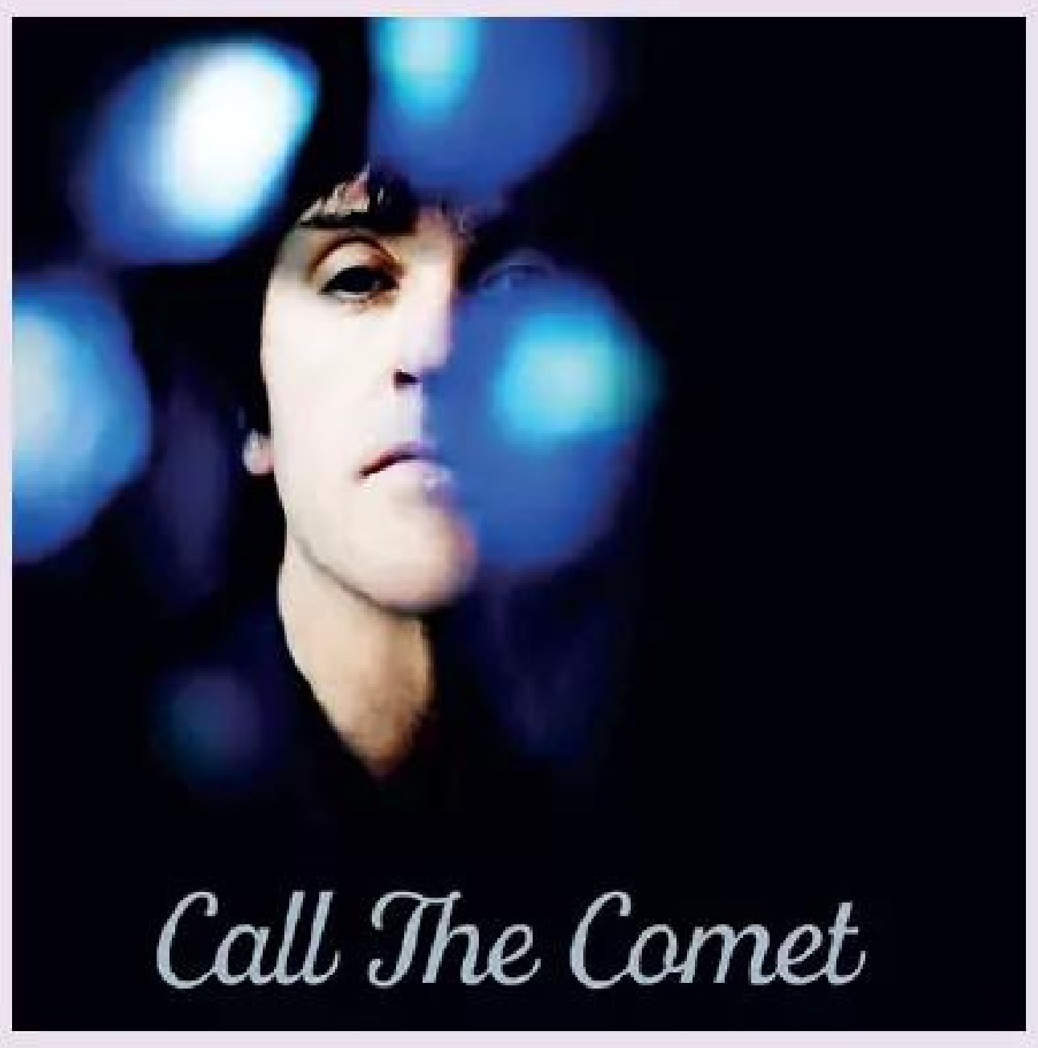
Elsewhere, *Dynamo* is a suitably skyscraping burst of indie rock dedicated to Manchester's CIS Tower, *This Tension* and the title track proves Marr still holds a torch for jangle pop and 70s glam respectively, while the propulsive *Back In The Box* and *Little King* are the sounds of a man making up for lost solo time.

The quick follow-up isn't exactly the musical wonderland promised by its title – inspired by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's theory that playtime lies at the heart of modern civilisation. But what this album lacks in adventure, it makes up for in sheer unadulterated energy.

WHAT *PLAYLAND* LACKS IN ADVENTURE, IT MAKES UP FOR IN SHEER UNADULTERATED ENERGY

PLAYLAND

Released 2014
Label New Voodoo/ Warner Bros
Chart Position UK No.9



"This time around, I had to imagine a society, rather than just report what I see," Marr told the *NME* about third LP *Call The Comet*. Indeed, rather than reflect on the hellfire of Brexit and Trump's rise to power that had occurred since his last solo venture, the guitarist decided the world desperately needed a major dose of positivity.

Marr's utopian dream is perhaps best realised on *Actor Attractor*, a krautrock-inspired mission statement for the entire record ("Forever we can live to the limit").

But *The Tracers*, a slice of gothic pop which could almost be mistaken for Sisters of Mercy, stadium rock-adjacent *Spiral Cities* and *A Different Gun*, the yearning closer written in the wake of the deadly Bastille Day attack in Nice two years earlier, all offer a similar sense of hope that things can get better.

Although there are still several nods to Marr's past – *Hi Hello* borrows from both *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* and Patti Smith's *Dancing Barefoot* – *Call The Comet* is far more interested in looking forward musically, too, with the chiming New Romanticism of *My Eternal* and sombre post-rock of *Walk Into The Sea* majestic forays into fresh sonic territories.

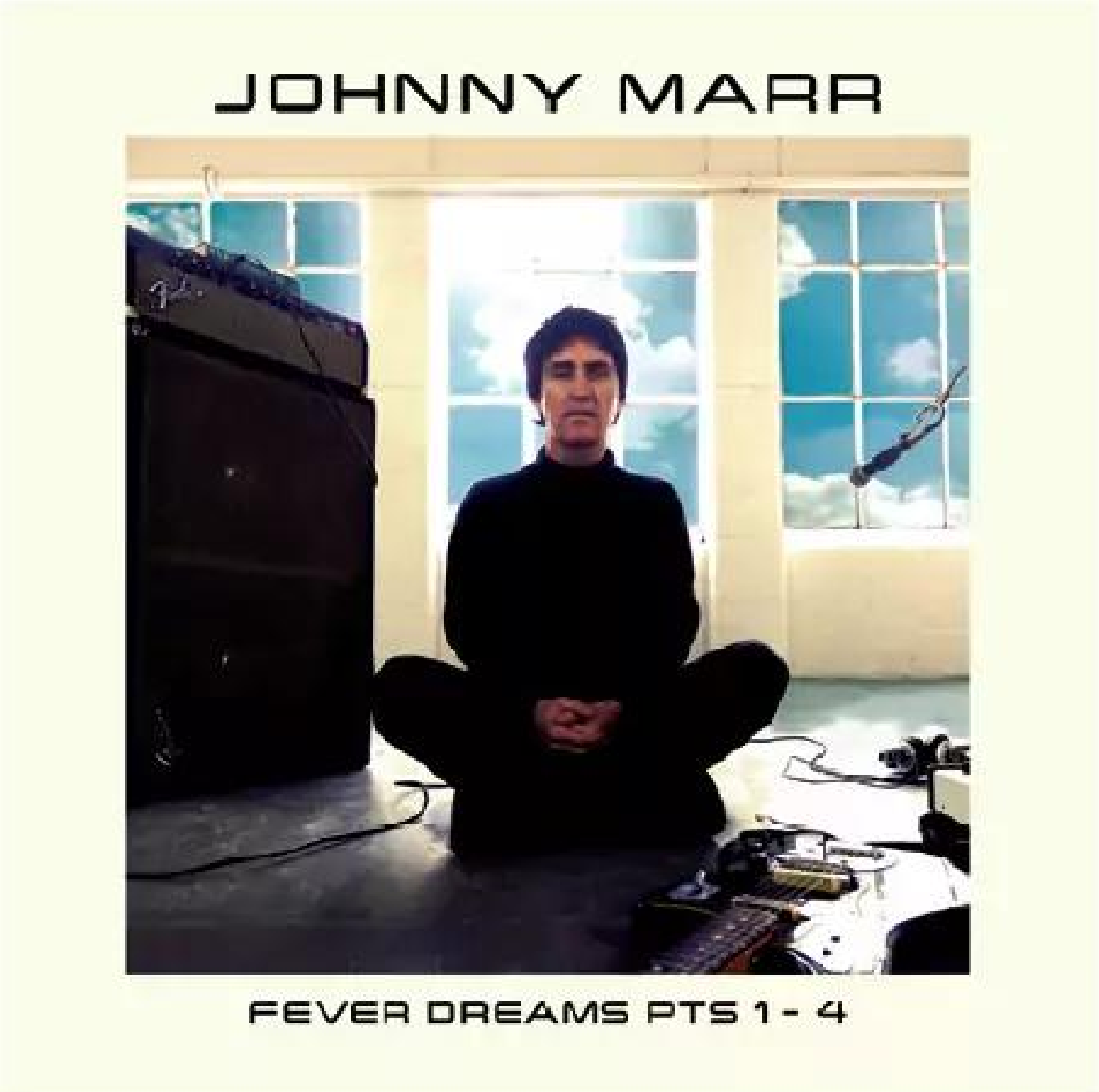
For the first time, Marr's solo career was now trumping Morrissey's.

CALL THE COMET

Released 2018
Label
New Voodoo/ Warner Bros
Chart Position
UK No.7

With his Glastonbury cameo alongside The Killers and contribution to Billie Eilish's James Bond theme proving he was still very much revered by both millennials and Gen-Z alike, Marr approached his impending 60th birthday with his most ambitious project to date: a double album, and one which thanks to the small matter of a worldwide pandemic, recorded in solitary conditions, too.

Not that the Mancunian let events outside the studio inform his work too heavily. "I didn't want to sing about face coverings and everything being closed," he told *Classic Pop* about the making of *Fever Dreams Pts 1-4*, the first two of which were released as EPs. Although both *Night And Day* and *Counter Clock World* both appear to allude to the days of baking banana bread and Zoom quizzes, the majority of its 16 tracks look ahead to better times.



The Primal Scream-esque *Tenement Time*, for instance, is a rose-tinted lament to the guitarist's teenage tearaway days ("I'm beating that street/ Running wild off the leash"), while *Lightning People* pays tribute to those who consider themselves a fully-fledged member of the Marr army.

On the surging post-punk of *Receiver* and brooding *The Speed Of Love*, the journeyman, who's never exactly been renowned for his amorous nature, starts to aim his charms towards the bedroom.

Once again, Marr is in genre-hopping form, channelling Queens Of The Stone Age on the desert rock of *Hideaway Girl*, embracing his big screen work with Hans Zimmer on the ambient sci-fi soundscape of *Rubicon* and drawing things to a close with *Human*, a redemptive acoustic ballad which recalls 70s John Lennon.

The throbbing electro-rock of opener *Spirit Power And Soul*, meanwhile, is a strong candidate for his finest solo single.

Of course, clocking in near the 75-minute mark, *Fever Dreams* doesn't always sustain interest.

However, achieving Marr's highest chart position since The Smiths' first *Best Of* in 1992, its audaciousness undeniably paid off. ■

LIGHTNING PEOPLE PAYS TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES A FULLY-FLEDGED MEMBER OF THE MARR ARMY

FEVER DREAMS PTS 1-4

Released 2022
Label New Voodoo/ BMGx
Chart Position
UK No.4

HEAVEN 17

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DE LA WARR PAVILION
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Wednesday 12 November
LEEDS O2 ACADEMY
Thursday 13 November
GLASGOW BARROWLAND
Friday 14 November
SHEFFIELD OCTAGON
Saturday 15 November
LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY
Monday 17 November
NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
Wednesday 19 November
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07 **SHEFFIELD** *City Hall*
09 **LONDON** *Palladium*
10 **LONDON** *Palladium*
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14 **GLASGOW** *Armadillo*
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Sat 13 **NOTTINGHAM** Motorpoint Arena
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Tony Hadley's love of big band and swing music, including that of Frank Sinatra (inset), stretches back to his childhood

> "I got to live out my dream. If you aim big enough, you can get there."

© Christie Goodwin

Having enjoyed looking dapper during Spandau Ballet's commercial heyday, it should be no surprise that Tony Hadley has a lifelong affiliation with big band music. He's also got an affinity for singers who value style over technique. As he prepares to get classy on tour later this year, Hadley tells *Classic Pop* of the joys of being an optimist, the future of Spandau and a close encounter with Frank Sinatra...

JOHN EARLS

When Tony Hadley was just 17, he invaded the stage at a Frank Sinatra concert. Although he was a teenage punk in 1977, into the Sex Pistols and Generation X, Hadley wasn't trying any anti-establishment shock tactics when he ran on at London's venerable Royal Albert Hall. For one thing, he was at the concert with his mum.

"I was a cheeky young lad," Hadley says of his encounter with his parents' hero. "How I didn't get slapped, I don't know, as Sinatra was surrounded by his entourage. I just wanted to tell him how much I admired him.

"Sinatra said to me: 'Hey, let him through.' I told him: 'I'm a massive fan, I just want to say what a great concert that was. I'm in a band and I want to be a singer.' Sinatra said: 'Son, good luck to you. It's nice to see younger people at the concert.'"

Six years later, Spandau Ballet first played at the Albert Hall on the *True* tour. In December, Hadley returns there, covering Sinatra as part of his big band Christmas tour. "I got to live out my dream," smiles Hadley. "I say to people that, if you aim big enough, you can get there."

That Hadley is doing a big band tour is of a piece with his eclectic tastes.

Growing up in Islington when it still had working-class areas in North London, Hadley's punk tastes would merge with his parents' love of big band music. Patrick and Josephine Hadley played swing and crooners while preparing Sunday lunch. "I would always appreciate any music that was being played," says Hadley of his introduction to Tony Bennett, Jack Jones and Mel Torme.

"It's like parents now who play Spandau Ballet to their kids, who might say: 'OK, that's not too bad.'" His parents were also into opera, as Hadley says: "I was hearing singers like Mario Lanza. In my early days, my singing was semi-operatic."

SUITS YOU, SIR...

Although Spandau Ballet were, of course, among the crown princes of futurism during the New Romantic era, their frontman was happier once the band's image became a little more timeless, in line with swing's classic look. "When Spandau entered the suit period during *True*, I was in my element," remembers Hadley. "I was a massive Robert Palmer fan and he always looked super-cool, the same as David Bowie looked so cool in a suit. Excuse the pun, but suits suit me."

That unlikely crossover between punk and crooner still survives in Hadley's career. As well as the big band tour and releasing an expanded physical edition of last year's swing album *The Mood I'm In*, Hadley is working on a new pop album for release in 2026, hinting: "I've written a couple of songs with my band which are quite progressive. There's some really cool stuff on there."

The breadth of Hadley's tastes is summarised by the artists he names as current favourites. In the order of which he rattles them off, he's enjoying Lana Del Rey, The Wombats, Blossoms, Foals, Zara Larsson, Shawn Mendes, Swedish

© Christie Goodwin

House Mafia and Sam Fender. Try to pick the common thread out of *that*.

As *CP*'s writer lives relatively nearby, we meet at Hadley's local pub. Over the course of three hours and cans of alcohol-free lager ("It's a bit early"), the singer knows *everyone* here. He really does confirm he's happy to sing at a local village function. The taxi driver home spends a good five minutes eulogising what a nice guy Hadley is. He seems every inch the contented entertainer. Is he? "Yeah!" he beams, as if it's a daft question. "What else am I going to do, sit at home and be miserable? When I'm off tour, I'll say to my wife: 'Come on, let's go down the pub.' I've always been like that. I've never been one to sit in the hotel room on my own, I'm more: 'Let's get out there, live life to the full.' Because it goes bloody quickly."

Hadley is less happy to be reminded that he turned 65 in June, saying of his OAP status: "It's shit, isn't it? It's *appalling*. When you're a kid, seeing your aunties go: 'Haven't you got tall?', you think: 'Oh shut up, you silly old sod.' At a certain point, you realise how right they were. I'm trying to take stock, and I've become more selective about the gigs I do. I'm not so manic, so I only choose the things I really like. But there are a lot of things I really like..."

> "I'm one of the most determined buggers on the planet. Knock me down and I'll come back up again and again."

© Neil Kitson

Featuring classic songs by Sinatra and Tony Bennett, Hadley kicks off his Christmas Big Band Tour in November

That contentment is partly due to Hadley being at ease with his status in pop. He'd love another hit single, but accepts that's unlikely. He's happy that he's shown he can be a songwriter away from Spandau, then quickly adds he prefers getting others in to arrange them. Generally, he acknowledges: "My career has been up and down like a yo-yo. I've hit a plateau now, where people have started calling me a legend. I'll definitely take that one."

A STICKY START

Hadley's only real self-doubt came after Spandau's first split, when his 1992 solo debut album *The State Of Play* failed to chart. Hadley was considering moving to America, making an album influenced by his love of US rock like Bon Jovi and John Mellencamp.

"Halfway through, I realised I was making the wrong album," he recalls. "When it did diddly-squat, that was a moment of panic. I thought: 'Shit, what am I going to do?' I love music and I don't know anything else. But I'm one of the most determined buggers on the planet. Knock me down and I'll come back up again and again."

Hadley puts that tenacity down to both his parents – "Mum taught us you could achieve anything" – and the good fortune of his generation. He thinks there was "a massive optimism" in believing anyone could achieve what they wanted, that "the era of tipping your hat and thinking you were less than somebody else was fading away. That determination sticks with you."

That spirit helped when Hadley, John Keeble and Steve Norman lost their 1999 court case against Gary Kemp over songwriting royalties. "When I lost that court case, it was like getting whacked around the head with a baseball bat," he admits. "But I've always been a glass half-full optimist. Immediately afterwards, I thought: 'OK, now what?' I've always bounced back."

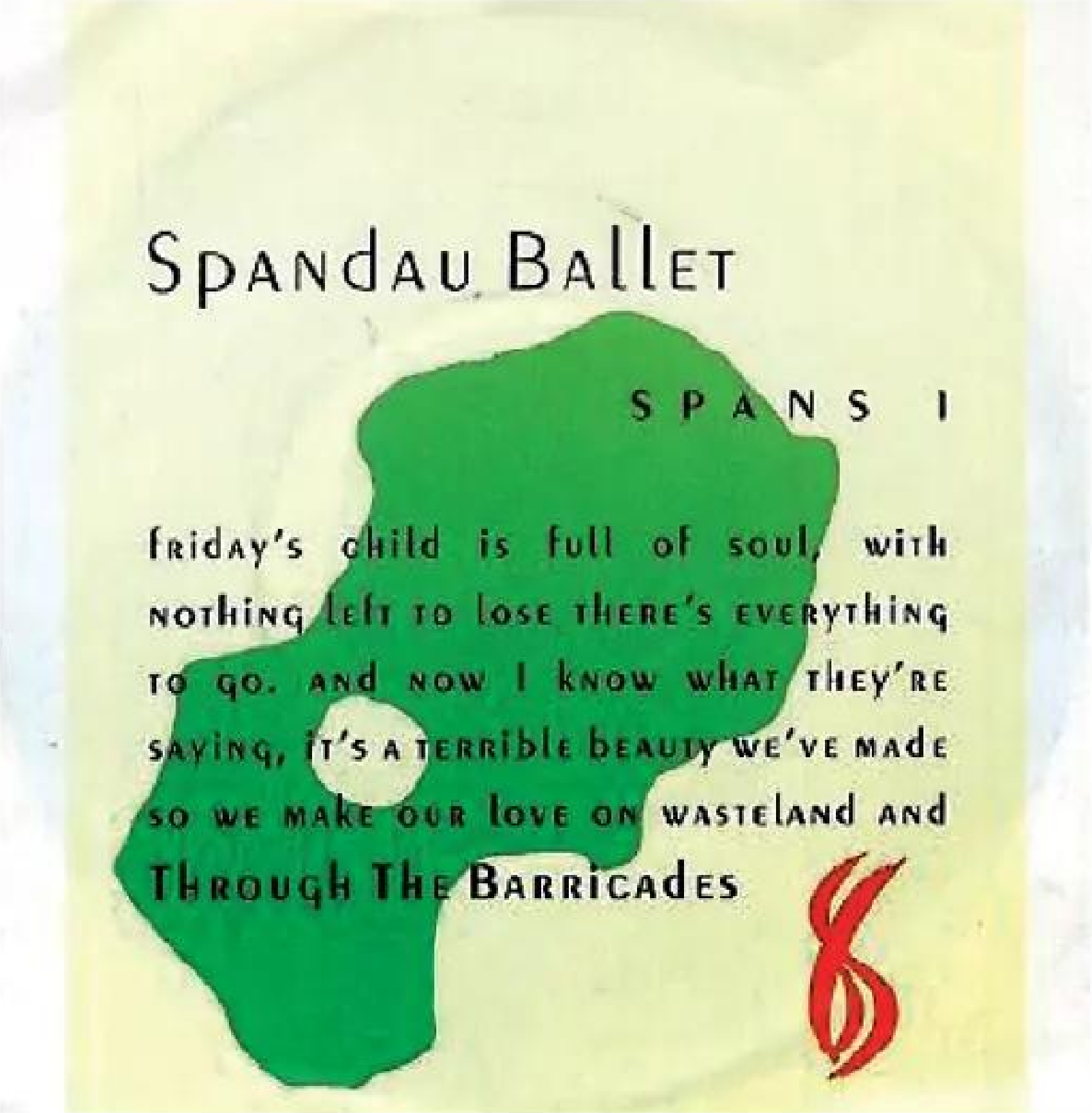
Hadley has also bounced back from the aftermath of Spandau's seemingly final split in 2017. Both sides have had their say over the reasons for the singer's departure, but a previously forthright Gary Kemp told *Classic Pop* in January that he'd like to do another tour.

Asked for his thoughts on Kemp's views causes the usually effervescent Hadley to pause. He's convincing when he exclaims: "Really? That's news to me." He looks surprised rather than cautious over his words when asked what he'd say to Kemp if an offer came through. "I don't think it would work," he eventually considers. "I haven't seen Gary, Martin or John in eight years. Steve is the only one I'm vaguely in contact with. We had some good times, but unfortunately there were some bad times as well. That's just life. We had some good laughs on the last tour, then unfortunately John fell ill and it wasn't the same without him. That was difficult."

Trying to guess why Kemp has reconsidered the band's future, Hadley offers: "Gary might be thinking: 'We're all getting older.' That might come into it: 70 is just around the corner, so what if anything happens to one of us?" *CP* suggests that, when speaking to us, Kemp thought the band's fans deserved a final

This year, Tony will be joined on the road by his Fabulous TH Band, along with a full live brass section

© Christie Goodwin



Spandau Ballet

SPANS 1

friday's child is full of soul, with nothing left to lose there's everything to go. and now I know what they're saying, it's a terrible beauty we've made so we make our love on wasteland and Through The Barricades

A UK Top 10 hit, 1986's poignant ballad *Through The Barricades* is Hadley's favourite Spandau song

farewell tour. That's a notion Hadley disagrees with, saying: "I thought I did that in 2017. Let's leave it at that." He doesn't want personal animosity among his former bandmates, saying: "I wish Gary, Martin and John well, but I'm happy doing what I'm doing. I love the freedom I have now, the fact I can go from a bit of swing to a bit of rock. You can't do that within the confines of a band."

Hadley is happy to keep Spandau's music alive via the big band tour, insisting: "There's nothing worse than an artist who denies their past." As well as *True* and *Gold* – "You have to do those" – he's thinking of adding *Lifeline*. His favourite Spandau song is *Through The Barricades*, noting: "That doesn't lend itself to big band, but we play it in a beautiful way, with sax and flutes."

Through The Barricades was a song Hadley and his bandmates instantly knew was a classic. "I thought it was great because there's a poignancy to it," he reflects. "It told a story. This wasn't *Highly Strung*, about a crazy chick who lives in a laundromat. *Through The Barricades* carries a lot of weight. When we recorded it, everyone was saying: 'This song is so good and so important, you've got to sing this one right.' I was going: 'Calm down, will you?'"

Eventually, the pressure on the song became too much during recording sessions in Munich. "Everyone was staring at me in the control room," says Hadley. "It was: 'Can you sing that line more like that?' I lost it and yelled: 'Piss off! I'm not singing it today! You lot: sod off!' I calmed down and sang it a few days later with just the producer in the room. A few takes, and that was it."

Recognition from a Hollywood icon

While Tony Hadley spoke for the sleevenotes of Spandau Ballet's new New Romantic-era boxset *Everything Is Now*, he admits that he's mystified about the lure of deluxe editions.

"I'm weird, because I've never been into collecting anything," he smiles. "When I hear of reissues that are: 'We can release this on green vinyl!', I just think: 'Why?', but I guess that side is nice for the collectors."

Hadley insists he's "just not a nostalgic person," adding: "I've kept a few special gold discs and some for my kids, but I've given most of them to charities. What would I do with them all? Keep them in a box to sometimes get them out and go: 'Ooh! Aren't I amazing?'"

The singer's dismissal of nostalgia extends to revisiting his old performances, as he reveals: "I don't go back to listening to our old albums, and I hate watching myself on television. I had to watch the Spandau film, *Soul Boys Of The Western World*, three times at premieres. I can never watch that again."

At one charity auction where he'd donated some Spandau memorabilia, Hadley's neighbour Bob Hoskins introduced him to Michael Caine. A starstruck Hadley told Caine: "You won't know who I am, but..." The actor interrupted him, saying: "Of course I know who you are. My kids have driven me mad with your music over the years. How are you?" Hadley grins: "Michael Caine knew who I was. I was made up. I've got picture of Michael on my office wall."

Spandau Ballet in 1983: (L-R) Martin Kemp, John Keeble, Tony Hadley, Steve Norman and Gary Kemp

Tony now adapts Spandau classics such as *True*, *Gold*, and *Through The Barricades* in his big band concerts

© Christie Goodwin

Piers appears

Alongside producer Gary Stevenson, Tony Hadley is working with unsigned singer Piers Nolan (pictured), having duly been impressed by a demo he received via a friend of a friend.

“The songwriting is there and his range is incredible – but Piers also sounds individual,” enthuses Hadley. “If you put his songs on, you straight away go: ‘That’s Piers.’”

Rather than try to break Nolan via social media, Hadley is advising the singer to succeed the old-fashioned way. “We’re trying to get Piers on the road and at festivals,” explains Hadley. “Forget the socials, I think he works more of a live route like Sam Fender, by digging his heels in and trying to get a live following.”

However, Hadley is aware of the crisis in Britain’s small venues for new artists, highlighted by the Music Venue Trust. “It’s more difficult than it ever was to get started,” he frowns. “Before we became Spandau Ballet and were still called The Makers, there were loads of places to play. Most pubs had a back room where you could negotiate with them. It’d be: ‘We’ll see how you go.’ If nothing else, you’d get free lager.”

Hadley says grassroots music is currently in “a terrible state of affairs,” adding he has friends in successful bands who are having to consider their future. “They’re doing good business on touring, selling pretty good numbers for albums, but they’re having to pack it up. They simply can’t sustain it. It’s shocking.”

While *Through The Barricades*’ powerful sentiment can still cause Hadley to get emotional in concert – the singer “lost it” when seeing fans in tears during one show – he can always rely on *Gold* to be a celebration.

Hadley has a theory on why *Gold* has overtaken *True* to be Spandau’s biggest song among the general public. “It’s easy to sing,” he reasons. “It’s just: ‘Da-da, GOLD!’, it invites you to sing it. It’s become the song cab drivers go for: ‘Alright, Tony? GOLD!’ You know you’re alright then.

“You can’t fail with *Gold*. There are times I get distracted singing it. I will suddenly come to and think: ‘God, what’s the second verse?’ I get round it by going: ‘Right, you lot can sing it…’ My one issue with *Gold* is, why didn’t we play it at Live Aid? I think it’s because we didn’t think we could reproduce the orchestral touches at Wembley. Whatever, it didn’t make any sense to me why we didn’t do it.”

> “You can’t fail with Gold. There are times I get distracted singing it. I will suddenly come to and think: ‘God, what’s the second verse?’”

Of the swing songs, *Fly Me To The Moon* is “a piece of cake, like putting on a pair of old slippers”, but *Mack The Knife* and *Alfie* are more intense, while *Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered* needs Hadley to “really belt it at the end.”

Mentioning *Alfie*, Hadley believes Cilla Black is an underrated singer, recalling how she nailed the classic theme song on its second take. Of his Spandau vocals, *Lifeline* and *Empty Spaces* were done on the first take. He laughs when talking about rock producer Mutt Lange’s infamously “microscopic” approach with singers that Hadley has heard about from his friend, Joe Elliott, but admits: “If I walk away from doing a vocal and one bit isn’t quite right, I’ll beat myself up about it.”

SWING STATE

Asked to assess his own voice, Hadley considers: “I’ve always had a big voice and it’s always sounded like me. That gives me an identity, whether you like my voice or not. My influences are all brilliant voices, but I’m not interested in technicality. Loads of singers can do more vocal twiddles than me and are technically better, but that’s not what I’m interested in.

“The great swing singers – Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Ella Fitzgerald, Jack Jones – weren’t technically perfect. But if you put their records on, you know it’s them straight away. It was the same in Spandau’s day. Spandau, Duran, Culture Club, Depeche, The Human League: every one of those singers has an identity.”

Tony Hadley definitely has an identity. Now he can stretch himself across pop, progressive music, big band and crooning, he’s showing just how versatile that identity is. He might now be a grandad and an OAP, but he’s still living life to the full. ■

● Tony Hadley’s Christmas Big Band Tour runs from 23 November to 17 December. Visit myticket.co.uk for more details on dates and ticket availability. The expanded version of *The Mood I’m In* will be released later this year.

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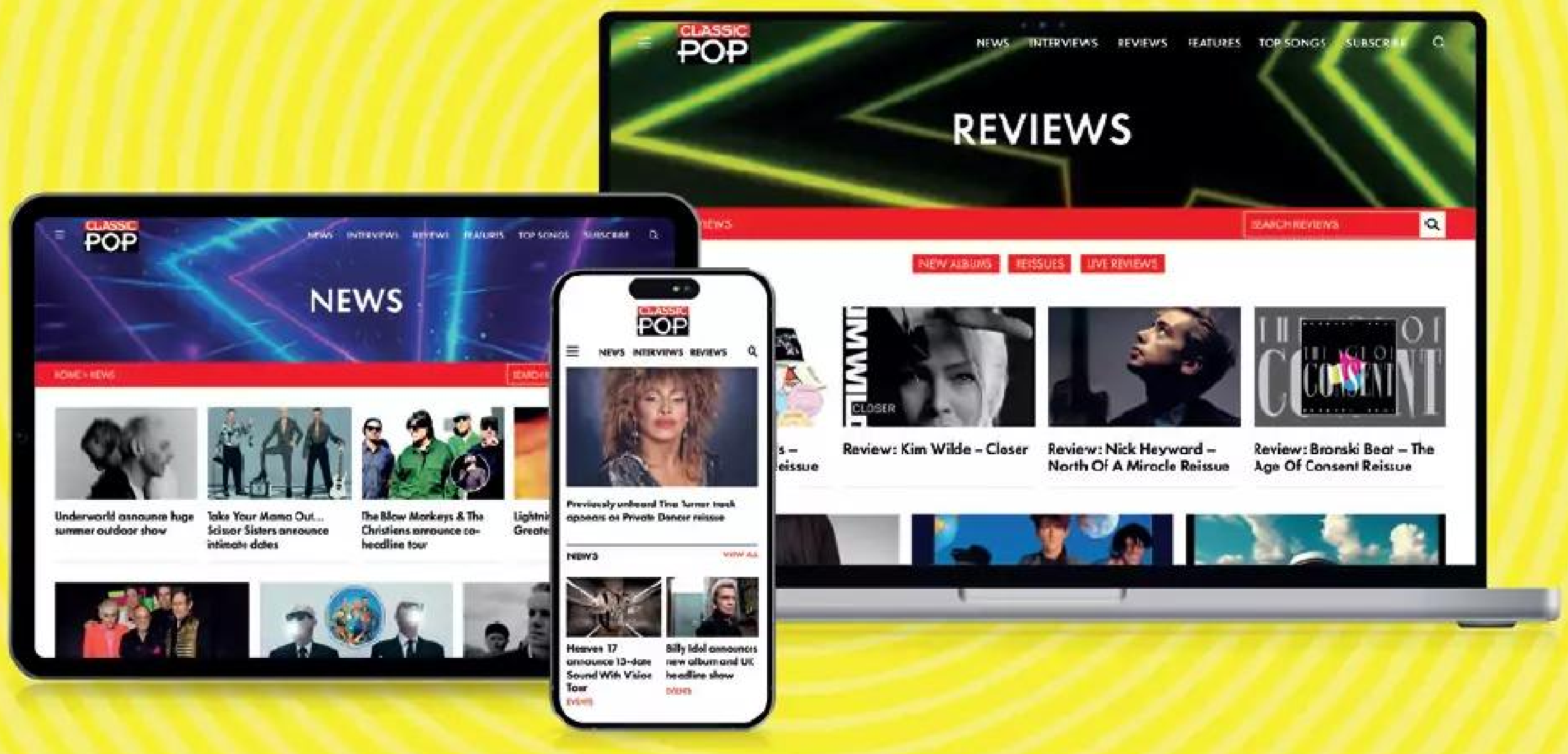
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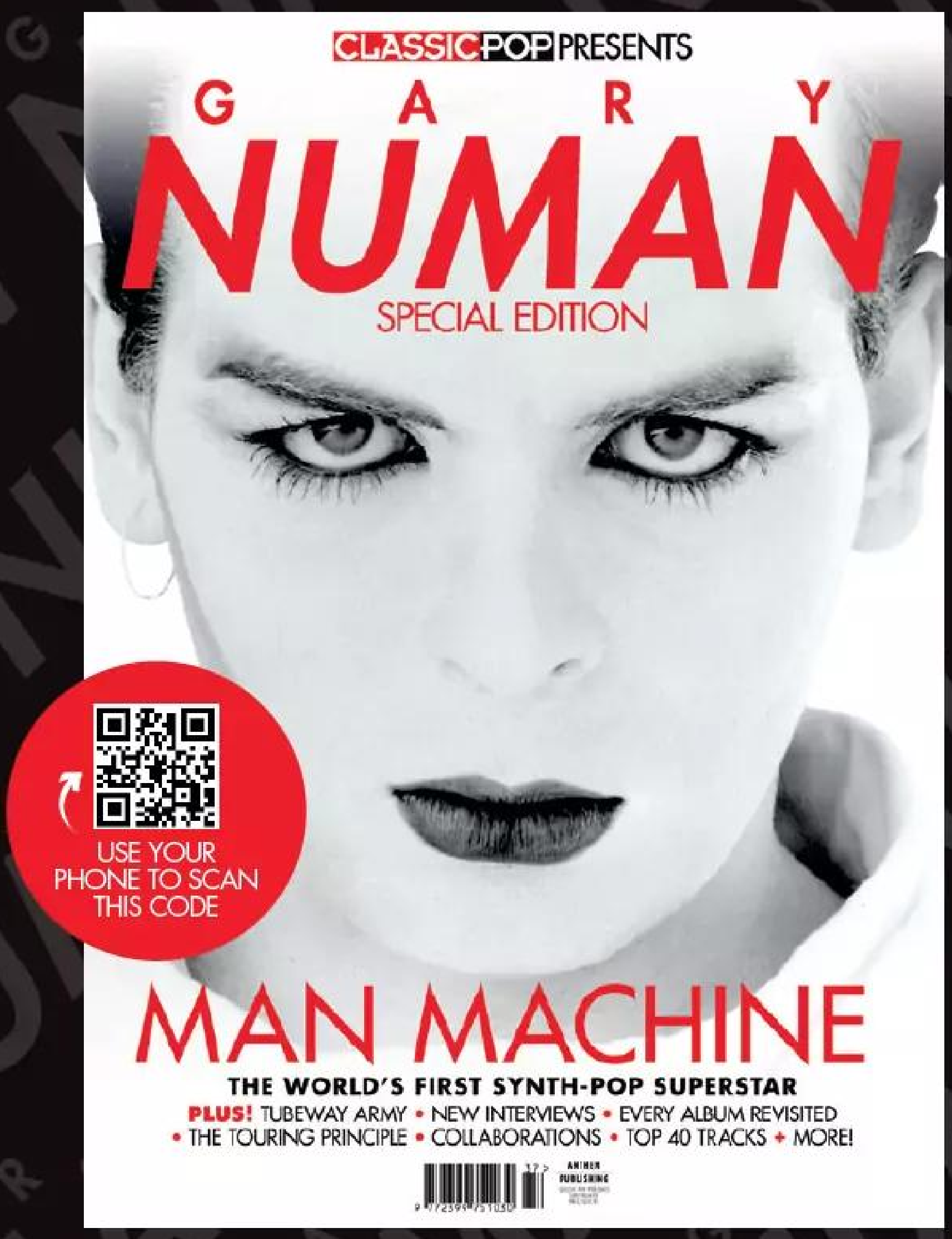
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30/08/25	RÜSSELSHEIM, DE DAS RIND
31/08/25	GÖTTINGEN, DE EXIL
02/09/25	MUNICH, DE FEIERWERK
03/09/25	KARLSRUHE, DE DIE STADTMITTE (80'S PARTY)
04/09/25	HAMELN, DE SUMBPFBLUME
05/09/25	BOCHUM, DE TROMPETE
06/09/25	LEIPZIG-DEUTZEN, DE NCN FESTIVAL 2025
08/09/25	BREMENHAVEN, DE SHIVA
09/09/25	HAMBURG, DE MARKTHALLE @ MARX (+TWIN NOIR)
10/09/25	BERLIN, DE LIDO (+TWIN NOIR)
11/09/25	KIEL, DE DIE PUMPE (+TWIN NOIR)
12/09/25	COPENHAGEN, DK HOTEL CECIL
13/09/25	GOTHENBURG, SE MUSIKENS HUS
14/09/25	STOCKHOLM, SE SLAKTKYRKAN @ HUS 7
16/09/25	OSLO, NO JOHN DEE (+PISTON DAMP)
17/09/25	MALMÖ, SE BABEL

MEN WITHOUT HATS
I ♥ the 80s
PRODUCED BY BRIAN HOWES

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SHOCORE MUSIC

Inter Stellar

After 35 years and a string of modernist masterpieces, Saint Etienne are signing off in style with their star-studded final album, *International*. "It was definitely emotional," Sarah Cracknell, Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs tell *Classic Pop*.

PAUL KIRKLEY

Saint Etienne can't remember exactly when – or indeed why – they decided that their new album would be their last. "We must have felt it was in the air," says Bob Stanley, who founded the modernist dance-pop stylists with his best friend Pete Wiggs in 1990. "I've got a feeling I floated the idea. It just felt natural. It would be nice to say it was always our plan to do 13 albums in 35 years, but it didn't quite happen like that."

"It just seemed like the right time," agrees Sarah Cracknell, the face and voice of the band for these past three-and-a-half decades. "I think we felt we'd done everything we wanted to do, and I didn't want to keep going for the sake of it. Not that we would ever do that."

"We really need to come up with a good answer for this, don't we?" suggests Pete, the third and final member of the group to fail to offer a compelling reason why the world should be denied further Saint Etienne records.

But hey. We are where we are. And to sweeten the pill, *Classic Pop* has two pieces of good news to impart. The first is that this isn't really the end of Saint Etienne at all. "We're not going to stop working together," Bob assures us. "We're still really good friends, and if someone said 'do you want a do a film soundtrack?' next week, we'd probably say yes. It just felt that it was the last time we should do an album that's an *album*, with all the trimmings that go with it."

The second bit of good news is that said album, *International*, is a career-capping triumph that sees the Saints go marching out with their heads held high, assisted by a stellar cast of guest contributors.

Saint Etienne, featuring Bob Stanley, Sarah Cracknell and Pete Wiggs, will release their last LP, *International* (pictured below left), on 5 September

© Joe Dilworth

The Girl On A Motorcycle: Saint Etienne led the way in classy 90s pop

tales from
turnpike house
saint etienne

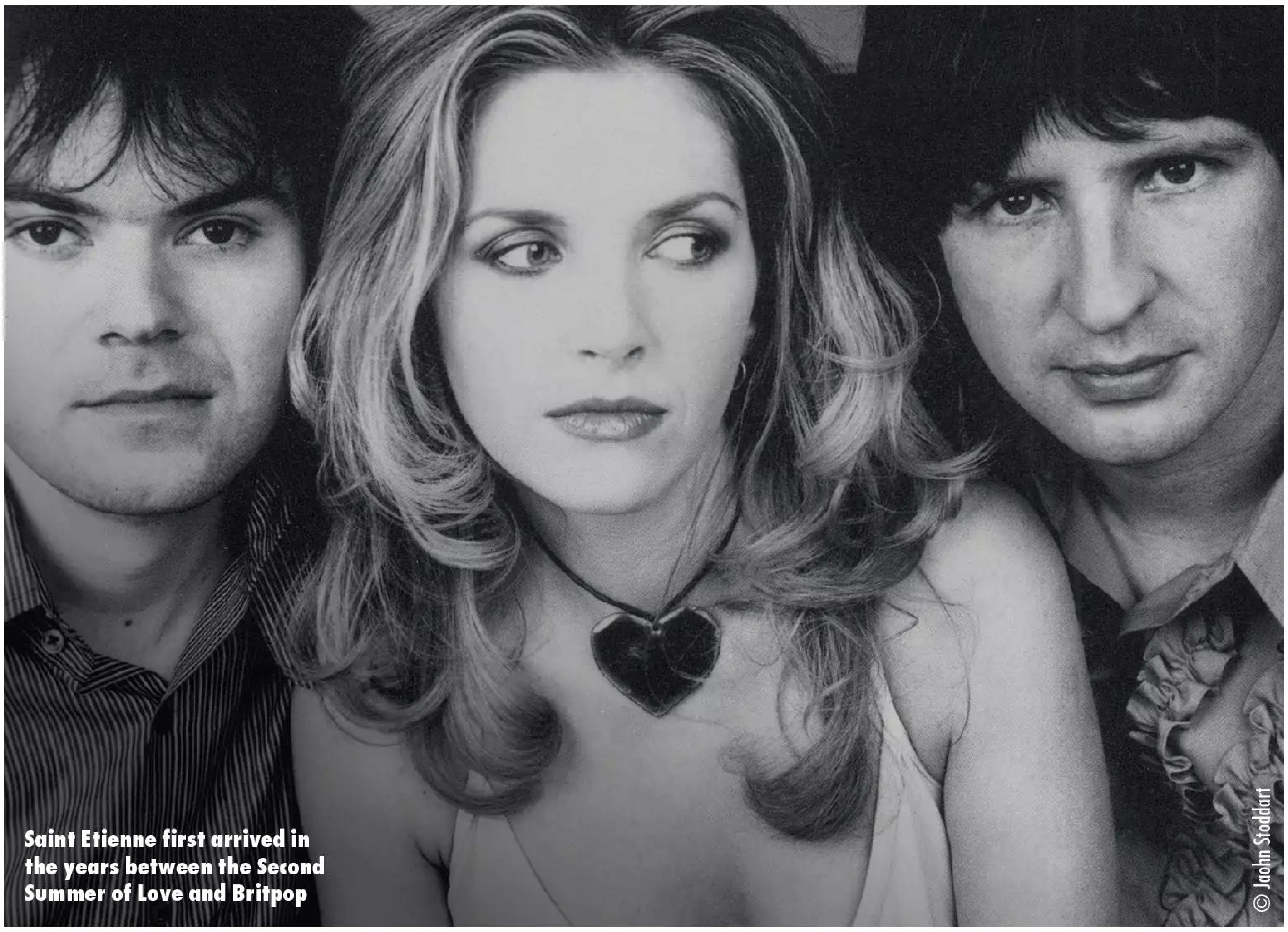
London Conversation

London – and the idea of London – is a theme that runs through Saint Etienne's work like a Thames-wide watermark.

From the musical gazetteer of *Foxbase Alpha*'s Primrose Hill, Arnos Grove and Portobello-namechecking *Girl VII* to their 2005 concept album *Tales From Turnpike House*, about the residents of a fictional London high-rise, and the trio of films they made with director Paul Kelly charting the changing face of the capital, the city has proved to be one of the band's most enduring muses. But none of them actually live there.

"Both my sons are there – they're carrying on the mantle," says Sarah, who is talking to *CP* from her home near Oxford. "If I could afford a pied-à-terre in London, I'd definitely spend more time there. I love being in the beautiful countryside, but I do miss London."

"I'm a tourist there now," admits Pete, who lives in Brighton. "I have to look at the Tube map to find out where I'm going, which is a bit sad."


Saint Etienne first arrived in the years between the Second Summer of Love and Britpop

© Jaohn Stoddart

From the first synth-laden stabs of euphoric opener *Glad* – co-written and produced with The Chemical Brothers' Tom Rowlands, and featuring Doves' Jez Williams on guitar – it's clear that *International* has been created as a counterpoint to the ambient dreamscapes of last year's *The Night*. "We kind of recorded both albums at the same time," explains Bob. "And as there are no beats on *The Night*, we decided to do something a bit more uptempo with this one."

Night and day, if you will. Unusually for such arch pop conceptualists, though, the trio didn't really have a grand plan. "So often our albums have a real mandate, whereas this one was more organic," says Sarah. "But I suppose, deep down, the thing we were aware of was that it is our last record. And some of the lyrics are tinged with that knowledge."

"It did add a certain something to the recording process," agrees Pete. "It made it feel more momentous, I guess."

WISHLIST WONDERS

Having so many fellow artists – a mix of longtime friends and wishlist collaborators – on board also conjures a sense of occasion. "It's a bit like us throwing a landmark birthday party – and pretty much everyone we invited came," says Bob. "Which is great. When I was 15, I'd never have believed that one day I'd get to work with people like Vince Clarke and Nick Heyward. That would have been a proper dream."

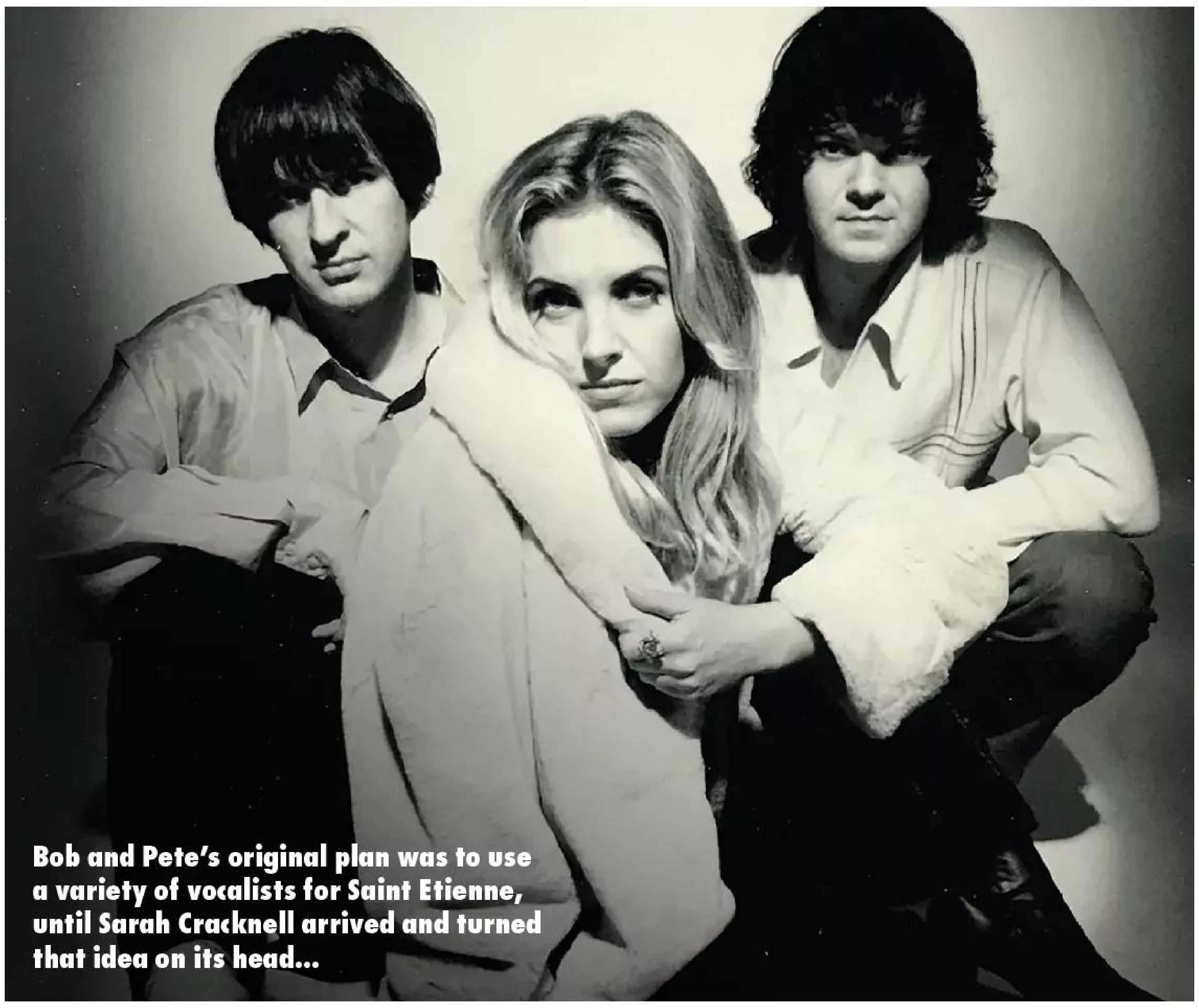
The Erasure and Depeche Mode legend lends his synth wizardry to electropop earworm *Two Lovers*, while Heyward shares vocal and writing duties on *The Go Betweens*, a winsome indie duet that plays like a summery companion piece to Saint Etienne's 90s Tim Burgess hook-up, *I Was Born On Christmas Day*.

"Nick sent me a really nice email the other day," says Sarah. "He said he was sitting listening to the song, and two blue tits landed on his balcony. He had found this quote about how that was a really fortuitous, positive sign. He was really excited about it."

Brand New Me, sees Sarah teaming up with Grace Stephenson – aka Janet Planet, of Heavenly labelmates Confidence Man. The song channels the same sunshine soul vibe as evergreen Saint Etienne classic *Nothing Can Stop Us*, from their debut album *Foxbase Alpha* – and that, it turns out, is no accident. "I'm sure they won't mind me saying, but Confidence Man are quite big fans of ours," says Sarah. "So I think there was a bit of an homage to *Nothing Can Stop Us* going on when they started putting that song together. They got in touch with me about maybe putting a vocal on it, but nothing really materialised. Then we had the idea it would probably fit well on our album."

So, it turns out that Confidence Man started out writing a Saint Etienne homage, and ended up on an actual Saint Etienne album? "Exactly," says Sarah. "They're made up about it."

Nothing Can Stop Us was, of course, the first track Sarah recorded with Saint Etienne – the one that persuaded Bob and Pete to abandon their original plan


Bob and Pete's original plan was to use a variety of vocalists for Saint Etienne, until Sarah Cracknell arrived and turned that idea on its head...

“When I was 15, I’d never have believed that one day I’d get to work with people like Vince Clarke and Nick Heyward”

BOB STANLEY

“I was almost crying…” Recording *International*’s closing track, *The Last Time*, was an emotional experience for vocalist Sarah Cracknell

to showcase a different vocalist on every song, in favour of becoming a fully-fledged trio. And *Brand New Me* isn’t the only full circle moment on *International*: one of the album’s spoken word interludes sees *Countdown* presenter Colin Murray recreating the clip of the quiz show’s original host, Richard Whiteley, that featured on *Foxbase Alpha*. “That was very kind of Colin,” says Bob. “He gave us about 30 alternate takes.”

It’s also another way of measuring Saint Etienne’s career, suggests *CP*: 35 years, 13 albums, seven *Countdown* presenters… “Yeah,” says Bob. “I was gutted we were too late for Anne Robinson.”

Other collaborators include Orbital’s Paul Hartnoll, DJ-producer Erol Alkan and Xenomania’s Tim Powell, with whom they recorded and mixed the album in Brighton, along with emerging talent from Bradford’s underground scene (Bob is now based in Saltaire, West Yorkshire). But on closing track *The Last Time*, the trio stand alone on a wistful, wryly funny parting shot that doubles as a farewell to their fans and a tribute to their own enduring friendship.

“It’s quite a humorous lyric, but also quite poignant,” says Pete. “It was actually the last thing we did on the album.” Was it emotional? “It was definitely emotional for me,” confirms Sarah. “I was almost crying. And that doesn’t happen often.”

It’s a song charged not just with closing the album, but calling time on one of the most singular recording careers of the past half-century. Arriving in the years between the Second Summer of Love and Britpop, Saint Etienne instantly carved out their own space by parlaying their magpie passions – forged from years of dedicated record shop crate-digging and taping arthouse movies off Channel 4 – into an eclectic but clearly defined aesthetic.

COLLAGE PROJECTS

With engineer Ian Catt providing the technical and musical know-how, the band’s DIY, cut-and-paste sound collages blended 60s pop and soul with 80s indie, techno and acid house to create something that was both old and new – modernism viewed through a haze of nostalgia. Urban and suburban (Pete and Bob grew up in Croydon, Sarah in Windsor), glamorous and mundane – this most cinematic of groups has always been equally in thrall to the French New Wave and British kitchen sink realism – theirs was a world where Bardot and Belmondo rubbed shoulders with Bruce Forsyth and *Billy Liar*, and listeners were taken on a journey from Wigan Casino to Saint-Tropez, via Carnaby Street and Clerkenwell.

Having broken the Top 40 with their debut single *Only Love Can Break Your Heart* – which reinvented Neil Young’s 70s folk-rock standard as a tripped-out Balearic floor-filler, with vocals by Moira Lambert of indie outfit Faith Over Reason – Pete and Bob found their perfect soulmate in Sarah: the daughter of Julie Samuel, an actress who’d appeared in *The Avengers* and *Z-Cars*, and Derek Cracknell, Stanley Kubrick’s first assistant director, she had 60s cool in her genes.

Shortly after the release of their second album *So Tough* in 1993, Saint Etienne were namechecked on the cover of the legendary issue of *Select* that heralded the arrival of Britpop. (‘Yanks go home!’ shouted the coverline. ‘St Etienne, Denim, Pulp, The Auteurs and the Battle for Britain’). “If you look at the line-up on that cover, a lot of those bands were coming from similar places, and it did feel like an exciting time,” recalls Bob. “It was only later, when it became bog-standard guitar bands, that people wanted to disassociate themselves from Britpop.”

It was the Britpop we *could* have had? “Yeah,” says Bob. “But it’s funny how you remember decades differently if you actually lived through them. I can see why younger people might look back on the 90s in a similar way to how we looked back on the 60s.”

Over the decades, Saint Etienne would make detours into techno folk (1994’s *Tiger Bay*), indie pop (1998’s *Good Humor*) and ambient (*The Night*). But, as *International* amply demonstrates, their love of four-on-the-floor beats and an Italo house piano remains firmly intact – even if it’s enjoyed at a slight remove these days. “I don’t go clubbing any more, but there’s a lot of dancing going on in the kitchen,” reveals Sarah.

Saint Etienne
Glad
saint
etienne
FOX BASE ALPHA

Glad* opens new album *International*, which calls time on a recording career that began with the release of their debut, *Foxbase Alpha

End of an era? Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs were childhood friends that formed the band in 1990

> **"Initially it was just about making an album. That was the dream. Then we got big-headed and went, 'right – world domination!'"** PETE WIGGS

Pete, for his part, can occasionally be persuaded to shake his booty in a tent at Glastonbury, while Bob remains a consummate armchair dance music connoisseur. Perhaps more than any other band of recent decades, Saint Etienne were always in love with the *idea* of pop music: Pete and Bob started out by producing their own fanzine, and Bob is one of Britain's most eminent pop scholars.

Is it a passion that still runs as deep? Or have the distractions of adult life pushed all that to one side? "You do get pleasure from different things as you get older," reflects Bob. "But it drives me mad when people talk about things being from 'my time'. What the hell does that mean? You're not dead. It's important to keep yourself excited, and keep discovering new things."

The Night is an example of a record Saint Etienne could probably only have made at this stage in their lives. A meditation on memory and the passage of time, it is both an interrogation of the 3am night terrors of a middle-aged insomniac – and an attempt to find relief from them. "It's sort of a journey from twilight into dawn," explains Bob. "It ends with the sun coming up – but not in the same way we'd have seen the sun coming up 35 years ago, which would probably have been dancing on a beach or something."

FOND FAREWELL

As for the future, the band have said they "may or may not tour" *International*. "We just need to see how it goes down," says Sarah. "We'd love to do some shows next year, but we don't really want to schlepp around on a big tour anymore, So maybe a mini-tour."

"Mini-tour, maxi-fees," suggests Pete.

"And maxi-fun," says Sarah.

So, has it exceeded the expectations they had starting out, this life of Saint Etienne? Or have some things fallen short of their early ambitions?

"Well, we didn't quite make 14 albums," jokes Pete. "But initially it was just about making an album. That was the dream. Then we got big-headed and went, 'right – world domination!'"

"I would've loved a Top 10 single," admits Sarah. "We made No.11, and had a Top 10 with Paul van Dyk [*Tell Me Why (The Riddle)*, their collaboration with the German DJ, reached No.7 in 2000]. But it would have been nice to have one on our own."

"I always enjoy hearing the Christmas song when I'm out Christmas shopping," offers Bob, as a mark of career validation. "And I heard *Hobart Paving* in Homebase once," adds Pete.

Pete has previously described Saint Etienne as existing 'on the fringes of fame'. Was that said with any element of frustration? "No, I think it's benefited us," he argues. "You see what happens to really famous people. They might earn more money, but they often don't look very happy. What we've had has been great. We have an identity, and that's given us an ability to just keep going, without having to maintain that massive level of success that often destroys people."

"I've had a brilliant time," smiles Sarah. "When I think back to the 90s, we were travelling all over the place with our friends, going out clubbing, making records... It was just fantastic."

"More than anything, it's just been really good fun," says Bob. "We all feel incredibly lucky to have been able to do this for so long. It's ridiculous, really." ■

● *International* is released via Heavenly Recordings on 5 September and will be reviewed in the next issue

Choice Cuts

While Saint Etienne refer to *International* as their 13th album, the actual numbers are a bit hazy. By *Classic Pop*'s count, they've previously released 11 studio LPs, plus two soundtrack albums, a whopping 10 mix and remix albums, and nine compilations. But if they're calling it album number 13, who are we to argue?

Pushed to pick a favourite from the career, Sarah opts for 2000's 90s comedown album *Sound Of Water*. "I've been revisiting it recently, and it stands up really well. I like the drums on it. And the fact we were living together [in Berlin] when we recorded it is also a factor, I think."

"Mine changes all the time," says Pete. "But at the moment it's *Tales From Turnpike House*. I liked it at the time, but I think it sounds even better now."

"I'm still really in love with *The Night*," says Bob. "We spent a long time on that record, and it turned out exactly how we wanted it."

"It's a sort of wistful rumination on us getting older," adds Pete. "But not in a negative way – just an honest way."

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"IT'S AS IF WE DISCOVERED SOPHISTICATION, SUBTLETY AND NUANCE OVERNIGHT"
THE BAND ON THEIR QUIET LIFE REBIRTH
LIKE A VIRGIN REVISITED MADONNA
ANTHEM PUBLISHING

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY
JAPAN BIOGRAPHER AND MUSICIAN ANTHONY REYNOLDS LOOKS AT THE ORIGINS OF THE FIVE-PIECE'S SEMINAL THIRD ALBUM QUIET LIFE AND THE LATEST 2021 DELUXE REISSUE WITH REFLECTIONS FROM BAND MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES

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CLASSIC POP

TOP TEN

WEEK ENDING 9 AUGUST 1980

ROXY MUSIC CRAFT A RADIO HIT, DIANA ROSS GETS HELP FROM CHIC, WHILE ABBA ARE CROWNED WINNERS AS THEY CLAIM THEIR EIGHTH UK NO.1

STEVE O'BRIEN

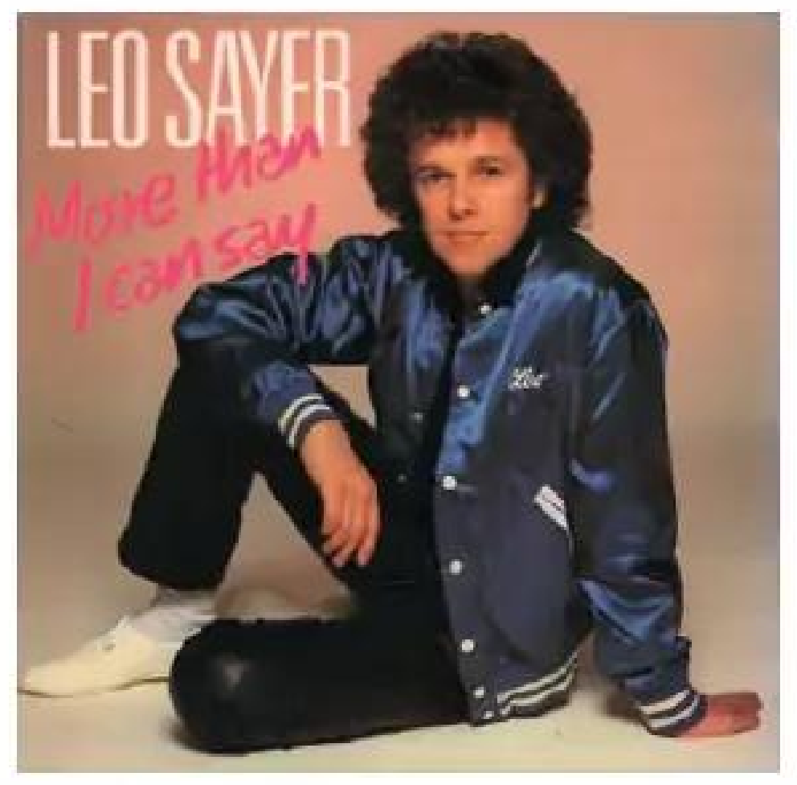
▲ 01 (9) **THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL**
ABBA
(EPIC)

▲ 02 (3) **UPSIDE DOWN**
DIANA ROSS
(MOTOWN)

ABBA
THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL · ELAINE

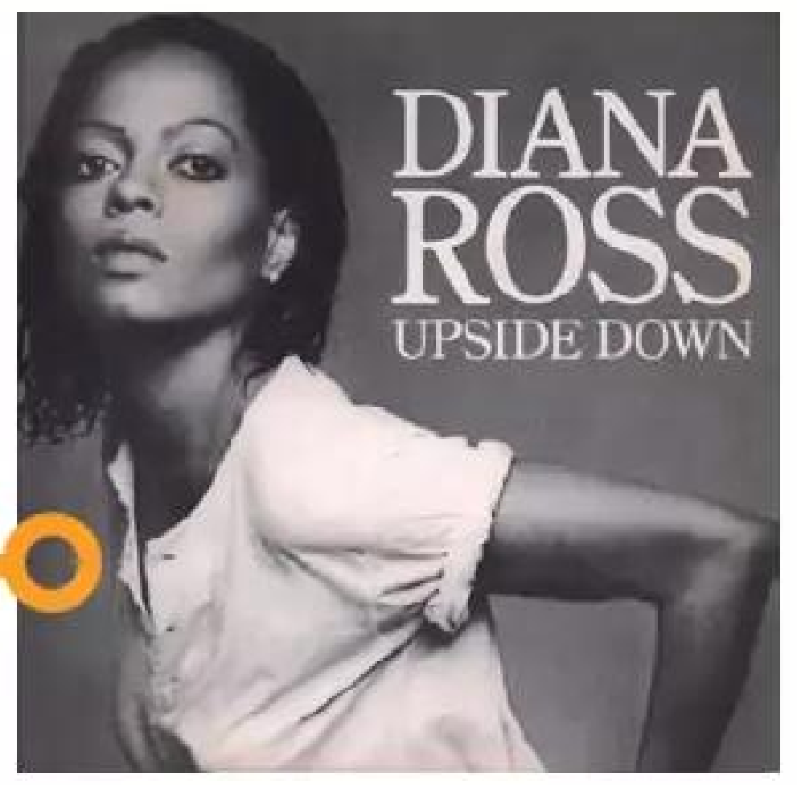
THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL
ABBA
(EPIC)

Voted Britain's favourite ABBA track in a 1999 poll for Channel 5, a feat it replicated in 2010 in a similar poll for ITV, *The Winner Takes It All* was the quartet's eighth chart-topper in the UK. A classic break-up song, don't go thinking it was based on the real-life experiences of co-writer Björn Ulvaeus and his divorce from bandmate Agnetha Fältskog. As he described to *The Guardian* in 2008: "Well, with *The Winner Takes It All*, the basis is the experience of a divorce, but it's fiction. 'Cause one thing I can say is that there wasn't a winner or a loser in our case. That's fiction. A lot of people think it's straight out of reality, but it's not." Aside from hitting the top in Britain, it also went to No.1 in, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland and South Africa and was Top 5 in Austria, Finland, France, West Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Zimbabwe.



MORE THAN I CAN SAY
LEO SAYER
(CHRYSALIS)

Just because we were now in the 80s, that didn't mean all of the previous decade's naffest artists had been consigned to the has-been bin. Originally a 1960 hit for Buddy Holly's band The Crickets (it was written by the group's Sonny Curtis and Jerry Allison and recorded in 1959 shortly after Holly's death), *More Than I Can Say* had been covered by Bobby Vee and The Beatles before little Leo decided to essay it. Spun from the singer's eighth album *Living In A Fantasy*, it came about after Sayer caught a television commercial for a greatest hits collection by Bobby Vee: "We went into a record store that afternoon, bought the record and had the song recorded that night," the diminutive popstar explained to *The Billboard Book Of #1 Adult Contemporary Hits*.



UPSIDE DOWN
DIANA ROSS
(MOTOWN)

If you wanted a guaranteed hit in 1980, you could not have done any better than roping in Chic's Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards, which is what Diana Ross did for this lead satellite from her 11th album, *Diana*. As Rodgers revealed to *Billboard* magazine, Ross met the duo backstage at a Chic concert in Santa Monica. "Diana couldn't believe the crowd's reaction," he recalled. "She said, 'I haven't seen this since the Jackson 5'. She was backstage, dancing and into it. 'My kids made me come and see this show, all they were talking about was Chic, Chic, Chic. That's what I want my record to sound like'." It proved such a crowd-pleaser that it's even a favourite of our current King, with Charles III telling Apple Music earlier this year: "When I was much younger, it was absolutely impossible not to get up and dance when it was played. I wonder if I can still just manage it...?"

RCA
A SIDE
STEREO
PB 1962
USE IT UP AND WEAR IT OUT
ODYSSEY

USE IT UP AND WEAR IT OUT
ODYSSEY
(RCA)

Two-and-a-half years after their previous hit (the No.5-peaking *Native New Yorker*), US vocal trio Odyssey were back with their first and only Brit chart-topper. Composed by Sandy Linzer (writer of the band's previous smash and *Working My Way Back To You* – made popular by The Four Seasons in 1966 and The Spinners in 1979) with L Russell Brown (*Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Ole Oak Tree*, recorded by Tony Orlando and Dawn), *Use It Up And Wear It Out* spent a total of 10 weeks in the UK Top 40 but bizarrely did zero business on the US Billboard chart. Ten years after Odyssey's success here, Pat "*Fun House*" Sharp and Mick Brown (recording as Pat & Mick) released a Hi-NRG cover which reached No.22.

▼ **03** (1) **USE IT UP AND WEAR IT OUT**
ODYSSEY (RCA)

▼ **04** (2) **MORE THAN I CAN SAY**
LEO SAYER
(CHRYSALIS)

▲ **05** (20) **9 TO 5**
SHEENA EASTON
(EMI)

▼ **06** (5) **BABOOSHKA**
KATE BUSH
(EMI)

▲ **07** (18) **OOPS UP SIDE YOUR HEAD**
THE GAP BAND
(MERCURY)

▼ **08** (6) **COULD YOU BE LOVED**
BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS
(ISLAND)

▲ **09** (30) **OH YEAH (ON THE RADIO)**
ROXY MUSIC
(POLYDOR)

▲ **10** (22) **GIVE ME THE NIGHT**
GEORGE BENSON
(WARNER)

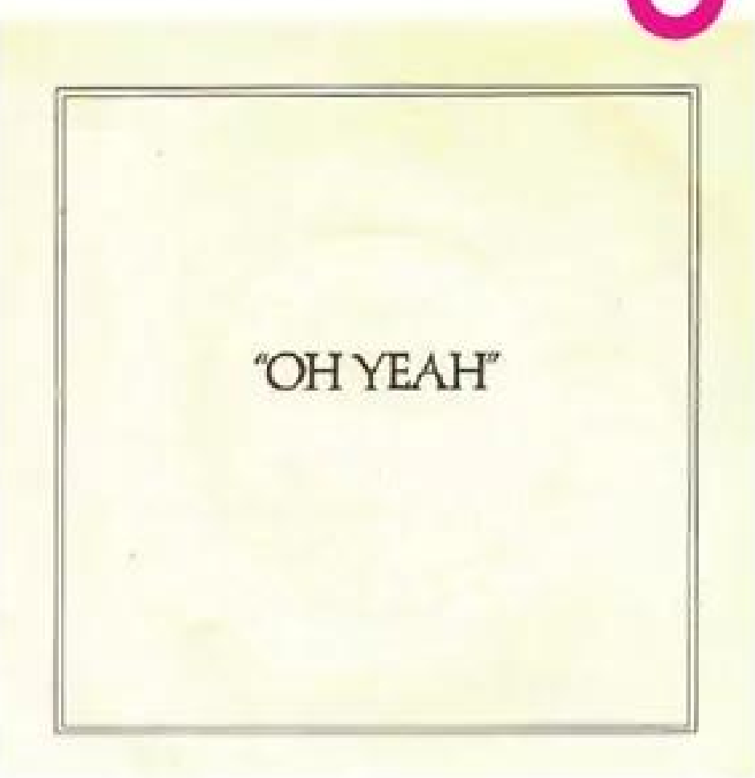
9to5.
Sheena Easton

9 TO 5
SHEENA EASTON (EMI)

Not to be confused with the Dolly Parton hit of the same name (in the US, to avoid confusion, its title was changed to *Morning Train*), *9 To 5* was Sheena Easton's second single released after the No.8-charting *Modern Girl*. Written by Florrie Palmer, it would hit the top spot in the US, Canada and Australia and go Top 3 in the UK. It was even a somewhat unlikely favourite of John Peel, with the documentary *John Peel's Record Box* revealing that the DJ liked the single so much that he had two copies of it in the wooden crate where he kept his most cherished 45s. Fun fact: Florrie Palmer is now an author, having released crime novel *The Decoy* through Bloodhound Books in 2019.

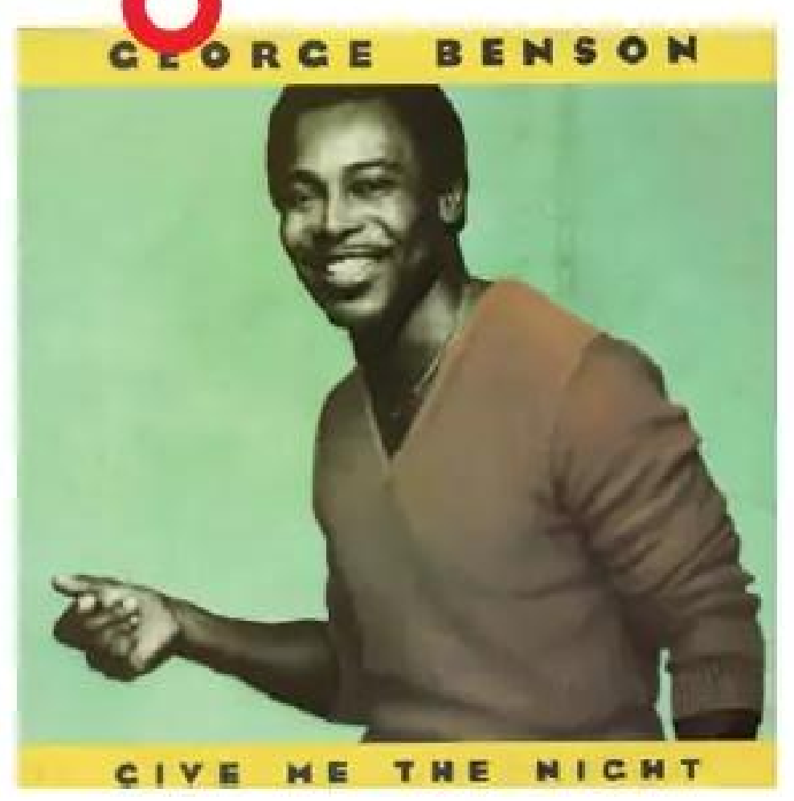
OOPS UP SIDE YOUR HEAD
THE GAP BAND (MERCURY)

Though The Gap Band had debuted with the 1974 LP *Magicians Holiday* and were, by August 1980, already on their fourth album (titled *The Gap Band II*), *Oops Up Side Your Head* was the R&B group's first UK hit. While it was never likely to win any Ivor Novello gongs for its lyrical brilliance (it's essentially just the words "Say oops upside your head, say oops upside your head/ Say it loud" repeated for three-and-a-half minutes), it was undeniably an earworm and a diehard club favourite in 1980 (with many hangouts favouring the much longer album version which clocks in at 8:39). In the years since its release, it's proved a go-to for various hip-hop artists including Snap! (*Ooops Up*) and Snoop Dogg (*Snoop's Upside Ya Head*).



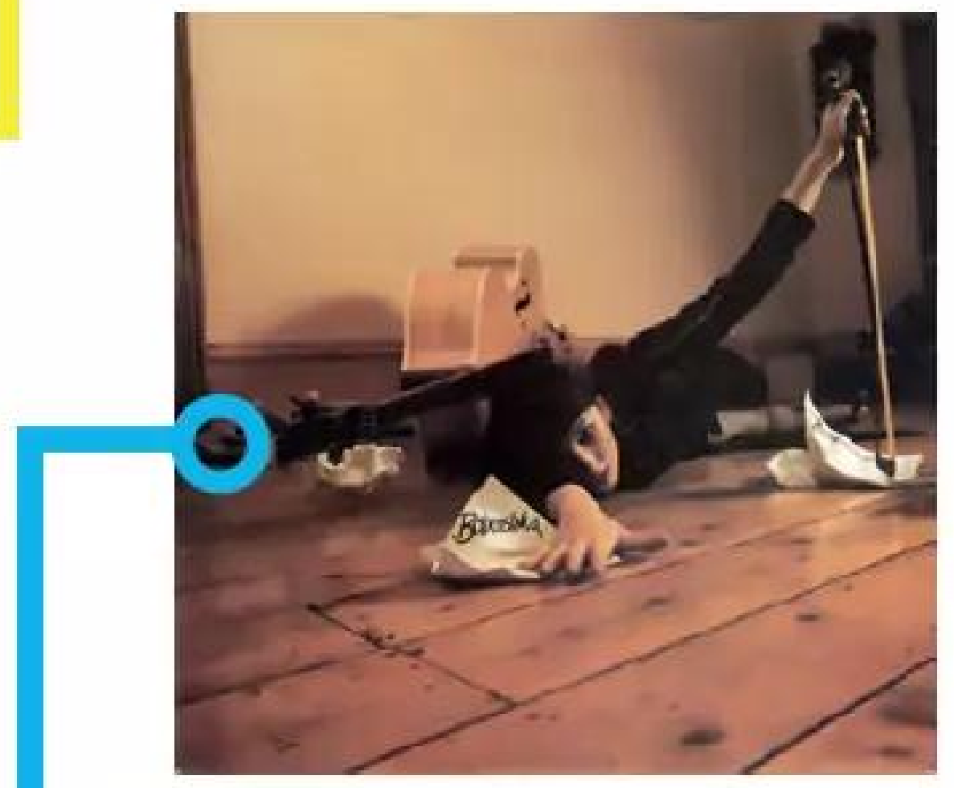
OH YEAH (ON THE RADIO)
ROXY MUSIC (POLYDOR)

When Paul Thompson left Roxy Music after *Manifesto*, the group were reduced to a trio of Andy Mackay, Phil Manzanera and Bryan Ferry. This was the second single from their seventh album *Flesh + Blood* and was, according to Ferry in *The Mail On Sunday*, "A song about a song, and in particular the concept of 'they're playing our song' – in this case on the radio, and in our car. I was trying to create a picture of Americana, and long hot summer evenings at the drive-in movies."



GIVE ME THE NIGHT
GEORGE BENSON (WARNER)

Composed by Heatwave's Rod Temperton and produced by Quincy Jones, *Give Me The Night* would be George Benson's first Top 10 hit in the UK, while also peaking at No.4 on the US Billboard chart. Three years later, its songwriter and producer would buddy up once more for a song that would beat even this one commercially... ("It's close to midnight/ Something evil's lurking in the dark...")



BABOOSHKA
KATE BUSH
(EMI)

Released as the second 7" single from her third studio album and first chart-topping long-player, *Never For Ever*, *Babooshka* returned Kate Bush to the UK Top 5 for the first time since her debut single, *Wuthering Heights*. Utilising the then-new Fairlight CMI digital synthesizer, it's a song about a woman who tests her husband's loyalty by taking on a pen name – Babooshka – in order to send him love notes as someone else ("She sent him scented letters/ And he received them with a strange delight"). As the *NME*'s Paul Du Noyer wrote at the time, *Babooshka* was "more luxuriant weirdness from sultry songstress with high-pitched voice."

BOB MARLEY
& THE WAILERS
COULD YOU BE LOVED

COULD YOU BE LOVED
BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS
(ISLAND)

Aside from his recent admission of admiration for Diana Ross' *Upside Down*, King Charles also expressed an appreciation for another hit from 1980, specifically the feel-good vibes of *Could You Be Loved*. Speaking from Buckingham Palace as part of Commonwealth Day celebrations in March, the monarch recalled meeting Bob Marley: "I remember when he came to London to perform when I was much younger, and I met him at some event. That marvellous, infectious energy, of course, he had, but also his deep sincerity, and his profound concern for his community. I always recall his words: 'The people have a voice inside of them'. He gave the world that voice in a way that no one who heard can ever forget."

WELCOME to the MACHINE

About to embark on a tour celebrating their commercial breakthrough with *World Machine*, 40 years on the album housing *Something About You* and *Leaving Me Now* still sounds a surefire smash. As Mark King and Mike Lindup explain, the opposite was the case. They reflect on anger over its early demos, tensions over going too commercial… and trying to balance hardcore fans' desires with pleasing the other 2,995 people at their gigs.

JOHN EARLS

Level 42, featuring (left to right) Boon Gould, Mike Lindup, Mark King and Phil Gould released *World Machine* in October 1985

Mark King went to see David Gilmour play at London's Royal Albert Hall recently. Impressed as he was, it brought home to King the varying degrees of busyness in Gilmour's music and his own with Level 42.

"There's so much space in David's music, he can afford to get to two-and-a-half hours in his show without breaking sweat," King smiles. "I bet we play 70 per cent more notes in an hour-and-a-half than David does in his show. Maybe someone can get a note-ometer out and check that. For physical exertion, playing for 90 minutes is as much as our old bones can take."

This is the kind of easygoing rationale that's typical of Level 42's pioneering slap-bassist and singer. He's serious (at least mostly) about Level 42's music, and the impact global success can have on a young musician. Mostly, though, King is happy to chat away about anything. Joining our Zoom call slightly early, and learning that *CP*'s writer is just back from a holiday to Rhodes, King discusses his fascination for medieval Greek architecture while waiting for the band's other founder member Mike Lindup.

The keyboardist seems equally chilled. Chatting to Level 42 is the definition of "This isn't really *work*, is it?"

The pair's relaxed outlook extends to discussing preparations for their new tour celebrating the 40th anniversary of their breakthrough album, *World Machine*, which propelled Level 42 to success in the United States and established them as regulars on the British charts, rather than occasional Top 40 visitors.

Lindup explains their agent invariably asks what Level 42's next tour will be called "and luckily we had the 40th of *World Machine* for this one." King jokes: "The tour in two years will be 'The 42nd anniversary of *World Machine*', so we can play the same set and save on rehearsal time."

They're particularly looking forward to revisiting songs they haven't aired in years, having bowed to fan pressure to perform *Good Man In A Storm* a couple of tours ago. *Coup D'État* and closing ballad *Lying Still* are the album's other live rarities, as King reasons: "The hardcore fans kept going on about *Good Man In A Storm* before we finally relented. It's a great song but, in a hall of 3,000 people, rather than pander to five people who are really we're happy playing *Good Man In A Storm*, we might as well play a song the other 2,995 people know and send them home happy."

***World Machine* spawned two UK Top 20 hit singles: *Something About You* (No.6) and *Leaving Me Now* (No.15)**

> *"FOR WORLD MACHINE, WE WERE AT A JUNCTION. IF WE DIDN'T COME UP WITH THE GOODS, WE WOULDN'T GET ANOTHER DEAL..."*
>
> **MARK KING**

Once the idea of touring *World Machine* in full was agreed, King's initial album research was simple: he Googled its tracklisting, realising: "It's interesting, because the first thing that comes up on Google is the US album version, which is a bit different to the British one."

The States replaced *I Sleep On My Heart* and *Coup D'État for* two songs from their previous album *True Colours*, including its biggest hit, *Hot Water.* As King puts it: "I looked at Google and thought, 'Hang on, *Hot Water* wasn't on *World Machine*, was it?'"

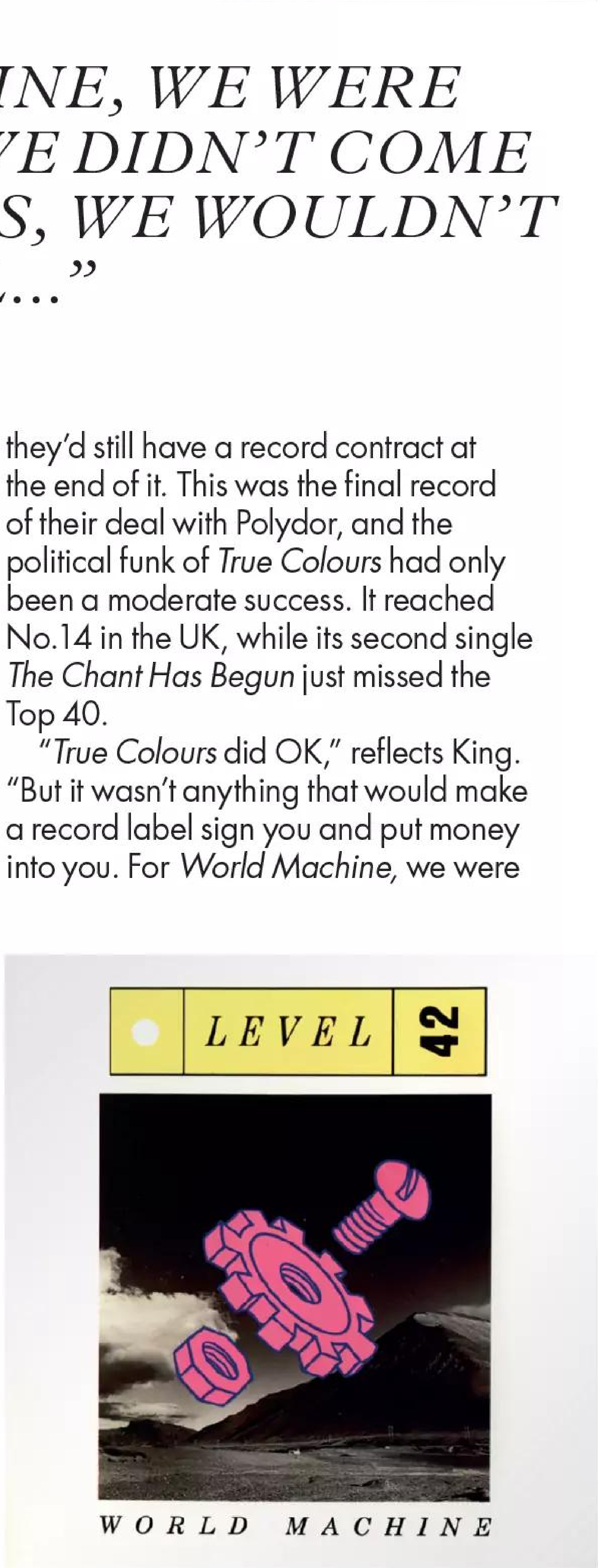
He's relaxed about this record company interference. Rather than fretting about having his art ruined, King shrugs: "I don't think the substitutions bothered any of us. They didn't change it that much, as the guts of the album was still there."

STATESIDE SUCCESS

It can't be argued that *World Machine* was anything other than successful in North America. As well as a double-platinum monster in Britain, it reached No.18 Stateside, leading to support tours with Steve Winwood and Madonna.

Yet Level 42 entered the making of *World Machine* in 1985 worrying if they'd still have a record contract at the end of it. This was the final record of their deal with Polydor, and the political funk of *True Colours* had only been a moderate success. It reached No.14 in the UK, while its second single *The Chant Has Begun* just missed the Top 40.

"*True Colours* did OK," reflects King. "But it wasn't anything that would make a record label sign you and put money into you. For *World Machine,* we were at a junction. If we didn't come up with the goods, we wouldn't get another deal, it was as simple as that. It was shit or bust. If we hadn't had the focus to sit down and come up with good songs, forget it. But we did it."



That focus led to a change in their songwriting. On previous albums, around a third of the songs – including *Hot Water* – would result from jams during recording in the studio. For *World Machine,* the band ensured all 10 songs were written and demoed before entering Maison Rouge studio in Fulham. "In getting the songs ready, it helped that home recording equipment had come on a lot," recalls Lindup. "Mark had a studio at the top of his house in Streatham. It all meant we were much more prepared."

But anxieties about the future with Polydor weren't helped when a very early demo cassette was leaked to the label: they still aren't sure how. Lindup remembers: "There was a question mark once Polydor heard the cassette, that: 'Maybe this isn't your strongest material.' We'd thought: 'This is going to be fantastic!' So I was affronted when I heard Polydor's reaction."

It should be noted that the demo the label heard was of *Something About You,* Level 42's first Top 10 hit, the song which broke them in the US. "For me, it's still the best song we've ever written" admits King. Lindup is unusually waspish as he says: "The usual stereotypes of A&R guys not having ears are always there. As a musician, you think: 'Of course this doesn't sound polished, but the potential really is there.'"

Lindup and King do their best to be magnanimous decades on, explaining the demo barely had any lyrics. "We were stung by Polydor's view," reflects the keyboardist, adding that *Something About You*'s backing track became "really beefed up" while Boon Gould finished its lyrics. "Boon bringing the lyrics in is when *Something About You* came alive," says Lindup. "Mark and I put the vocals down. Suddenly, the whole song went up so many levels, if you'll excuse that word. *Then* the label went: 'Sounds like a hit!'"

King had been frustrated by what Polydor initially thought on hearing the *Something About You* demo and how they wanted Level 42 to write more songs in the vein of *Hot Water.* "That had been our most recent hit," he recounts. "Even at the time, it struck us: 'What is it with labels, always thinking retrospectively?' If you look through Level 42's back catalogue, our next single wouldn't be anything like the one before."

But King accepts not every artist can always be trusted: "You have to trust the artist at some point, but I can understand the label's anxieties, as there are airheads who mess it up. We'd been guilty of that a couple of times in the past. Our third album springs to mind."

Well, quite. *The Pursuit Of Accidents* is the band's least favourite of their eight-year Polydor tenure. They tried to produce it themselves, only to emerge after two

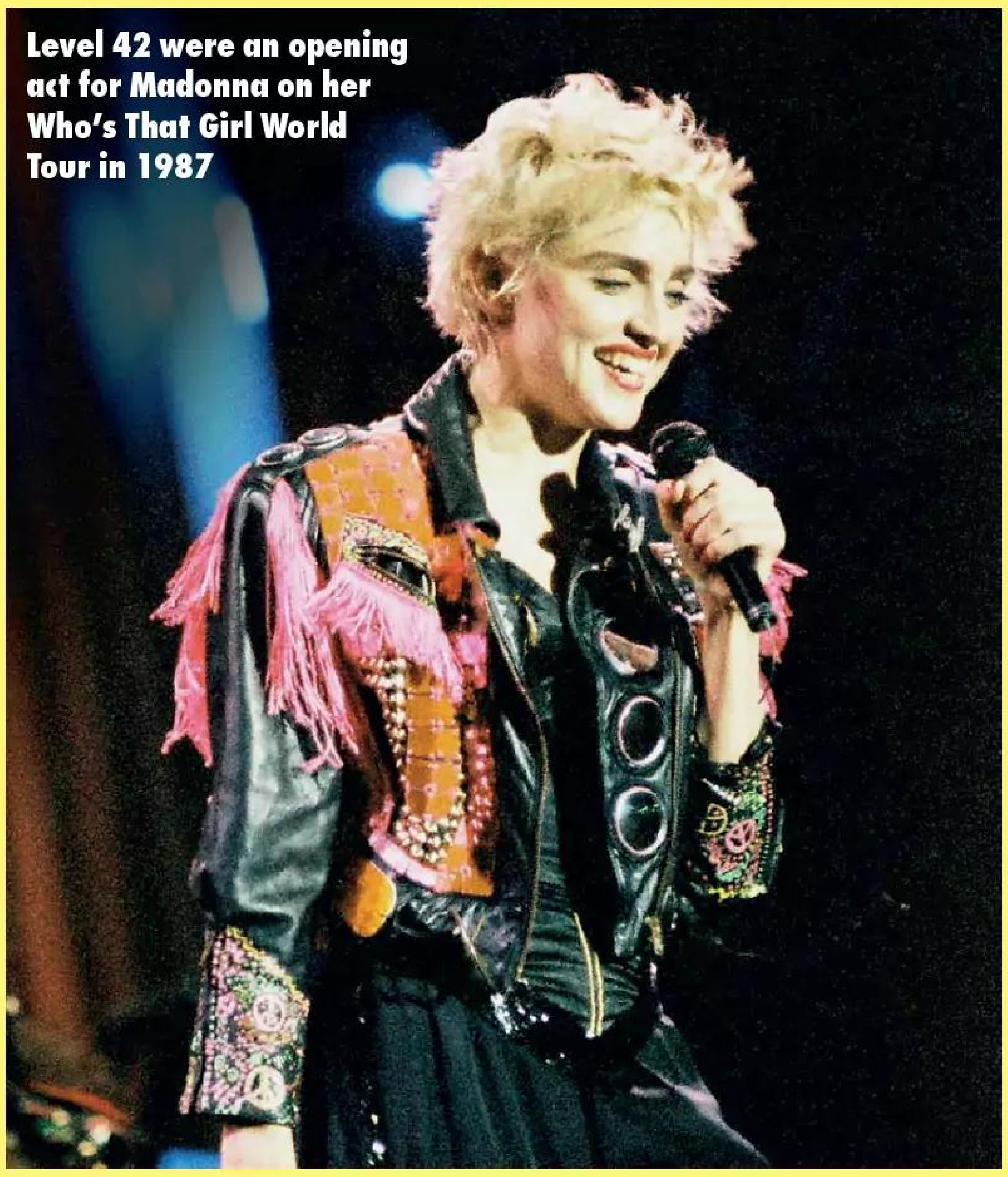
GETTING INTO THE GROOVE

After a period supporting Steve Winwood, Level 42 stayed in the States to support Madonna on the Who's That Girl World Tour for three months. Having first played to huge crowds with The Police four years earlier, the band were relatively serene at the prospect of playing before Madonna."There wasn't a lot of pressure on us," reasons Mark King. "It wasn't our tour. If nobody showed up, it wasn't our fault."

Their experience meant the band survived any resentment from fans who'd only come to see Madonna. "By that time, we had the self-confidence to know we could put on a good show," remembers Mike Lindup. "We were playing stadiums to people who hadn't necessarily heard of us, or who only knew *Something About You*. The good thing about that is, you can get to convert people who otherwise wouldn't have seen you."

The biggest difficulty was that there wasn't enough time playing actual shows, as King says: "Madonna's tour rolled into town and had to be set up. So you'd do a gig, then have four days off. That was the hardest part for me: how do you stay out of trouble when you've got four days off before your next show?"

Madonna met Level 42 at the start of the tour, a mid-tour bash and a wrap party, as Lindup says: "We didn't see a lot of Madonna, but what I observed was that she ran a tight ship and didn't take any shit onstage. She was huge by then and it was interesting to see. We made some notes..."


Level 42 were an opening act for Madonna on her Who's That Girl World Tour in 1987

weeks in the studio with one 10-minute jam. The band promptly returned to working with debut album producer Mike Vernon. King laughs: "That was a big slap back from the label. Let's call it one for the away team."

GROWING CONFIDENCE

Ironically, having subsequently worked with producers including Larry Dunn and Verdine White on 1983's *Standing In The Light, World Machine* saw Level 42 return to producing an album themselves, this time successfully. "We were ready and confident. We now knew what we were doing," reasons Lindup. "Having pre-produced the demos, we knew how we wanted *World Machine* to sound. We didn't need to get a third party in to try to take it in a direction we didn't want to go."

The presence of long-time associate member Wally Badarou helped in the studio, both for his synth expertise and as an adjudicator if any disputes arose among the main quartet. "Wally had been involved since our first album," says Lindup. "He had an understanding of how we all ticked differently, so he could be quite a calming influence at times." King adds: "We were always aware of the clock ticking in the studio. We knew that we'd got a week left in the studio and that was it, that we couldn't book any more time there as we'd have a tour booked. It was all shoulders to the wheel. It wasn't my band or Mike's or anyone else's, it was all of us. We were all responsible, and it was all our responsibility to get the damned thing done on time."

Although Phil Gould didn't leave until after *Running In The Family*, it's known that *World Machine* was the start of the drummer becoming dissatisfied with their move to the mainstream. "*World Machine* is a credit to all of us," insists King.

Following the moderate success of *True Colours* in their homeland, *World Machine* was Level 42's breakthrough on the global stage

Level 42's *World Machine* 40th anniversary tour, featuring Mark King and Mike Lindup (front), opens in Aberdeen on 18 September

© Tina K

> “WE WERE HOPPING AROUND THE WORLD LIKE NOBODY'S BUSINESS. WE WERE WHIZZING ABOUT SO MUCH THAT IT MADE YOUR HEAD SPIN.”
>
> **MARK KING**

“We all had a hand in it. That album, and *Running In The Family*, are good examples of the band understanding the game and getting on with it.

“I'm not saying everyone in the band was happy. Phil had other ideas about which way we should go. But *World Machine* was so successful, it helped steer the way it was going to go. You can't turn your back on that.”

As King implies, with everyone getting their input into *World Machine*, it wasn't as if uncompromising attitudes were frozen out of the band. The title track's talk of “Don't knock the system” furthered their shared love of science-fiction, while *True Colours*' politicised funk is explicit in *It's Not The Same For Us*.

Lindup describes the latter's languid groove as masking: “A plea that we might be from different places, but we've arrived in the same place from respective different cultures, how that doesn't mean we can't get on.” *CP* suggests that sentiment still sounds resonant today. “Exactly,” he smiles. “It is. But that's without naming any names. The person we're probably both thinking about has far too much airtime as it is.”

level 42
SOMETHING ABOUT YOU

MISSION STATEMENT

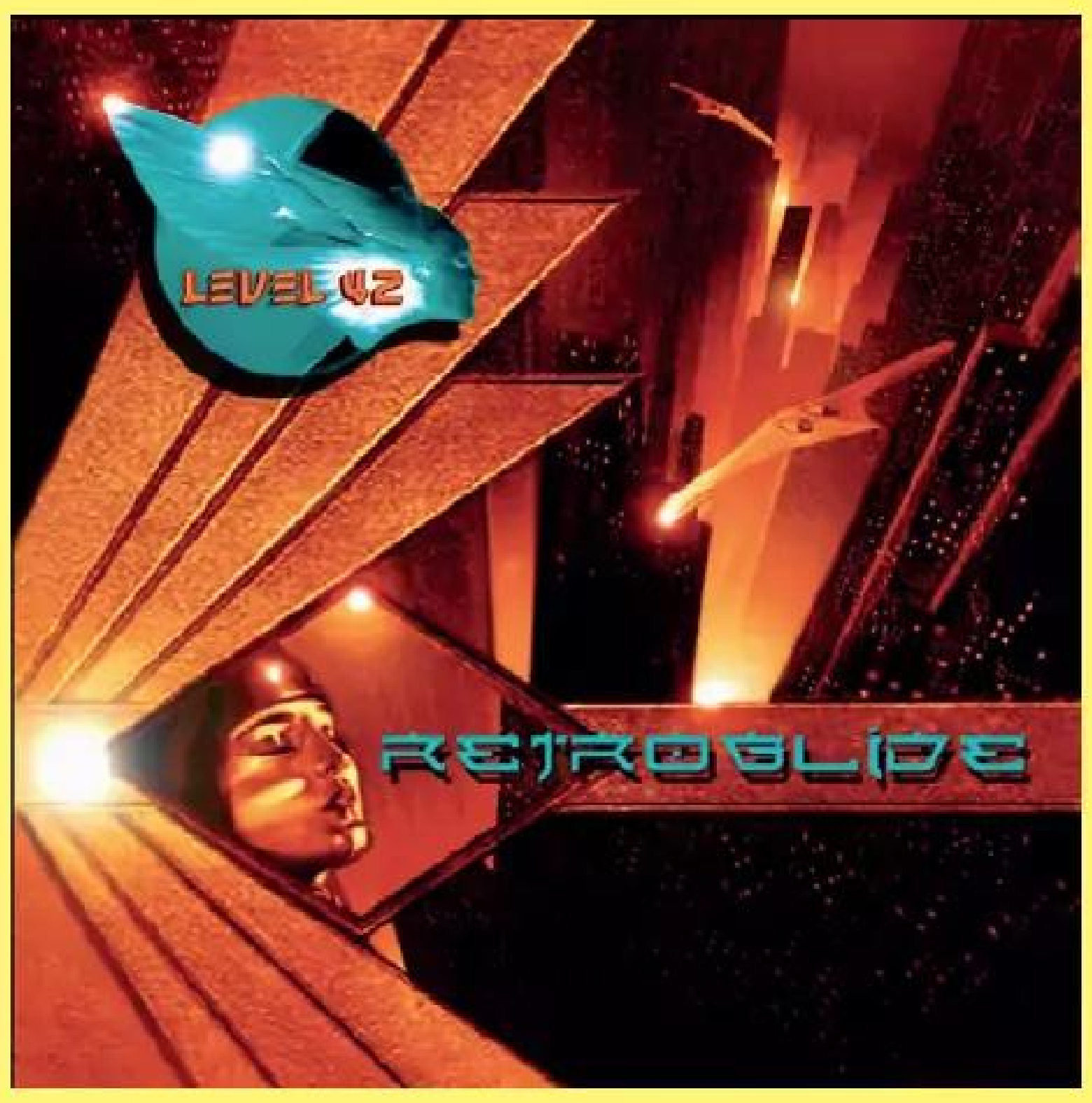
With such a taut, accessible album ready to go, success duly followed. It helped that *Something About You* arrived with an enigmatic video starring Cherie Lunghi. “Cherie had just finished filming *The Mission* with Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons,” laughs Lindup. “Now she's with four musicians trying their best to be actors. The video got a lot of attention. It puzzled people, but in an intriguing way. To quote our American record label: ‘Who *is* that clown figure? What's all this about?’”

The next 18 months saw Level 42 “suddenly become huge” as King puts it, adding: “We were hopping around the world like nobody's business. We were whizzing about on planes so much that it made your head spin. That was incredibly exciting. So many doors opened for us.”

The years of prior graft helped prevent losing the plot once success arrived. As Lindup rationalises: “By the time private planes and limousines were being laid on, it was obvious it was happening because we'd sold a lot of records, rather than thinking: ‘I must be a very important person.’” King was glad it helped cement a new deal with Polydor, saying: “We weren't one-hit wonders. There were four years of music before *World Machine*, so we were a pretty good gamble to re-sign.”

Polydor promptly renewed Level 42's deal and *Running In The Family* followed 18 months later. By then, doubts that *Something About You* being a dead end were long forgotten, at least by the record company. “We'd been questioned about our integrity and instincts,” summarises Lindup. “After going through that trial, I felt really proud of the album.” King is even more succinct in looking back on Level 42 breaking through into the mainstream: “The trials to get the flipping album released in the first place were immense. They get forgotten. History only remembers that it was really successful.” ■

Level 42's *World Machine* 40th anniversary tour runs from 18 September to 17 November. See level42.com for full details.



FUTUREGLIDE

Having released the two-volume boxsets of *The Polydor Years* in 2021, Level 42's two albums on RCA in the 90s, *Guaranteed* and *Forever Now*, were rounded up on 2023's *The Later Years*.

Their other album, 2006's *Retroglide*, remains ripe for a reissue – it's never been released on vinyl. That is due to change, as Mark King reveals: “We're trying to iron out some licensing issues, but we hope it will see the light of day at the end of the year to coincide with the tour.”

Retroglide remains the most recent Level 42 album. In the subsequent 19 years, King has been ambivalent about new music, veering from ruling it out (“I'm ready for the knackers' yard”) to saying it would need to be worthy of replacing established favourites in Level 42's live shows. But, asked if new music will soon be ready, King responds: “Yes. That sums it up: yes. Keith Richards summed it up best: ‘You put your hand and up, and suddenly something is there.’ That's what new music is like.”

Mike Lindup is slightly less elliptical, saying: “New music has become a labour of love.

“You have to be doing something that absolutely lights your fire to make it worth your investment. We're at that point.”

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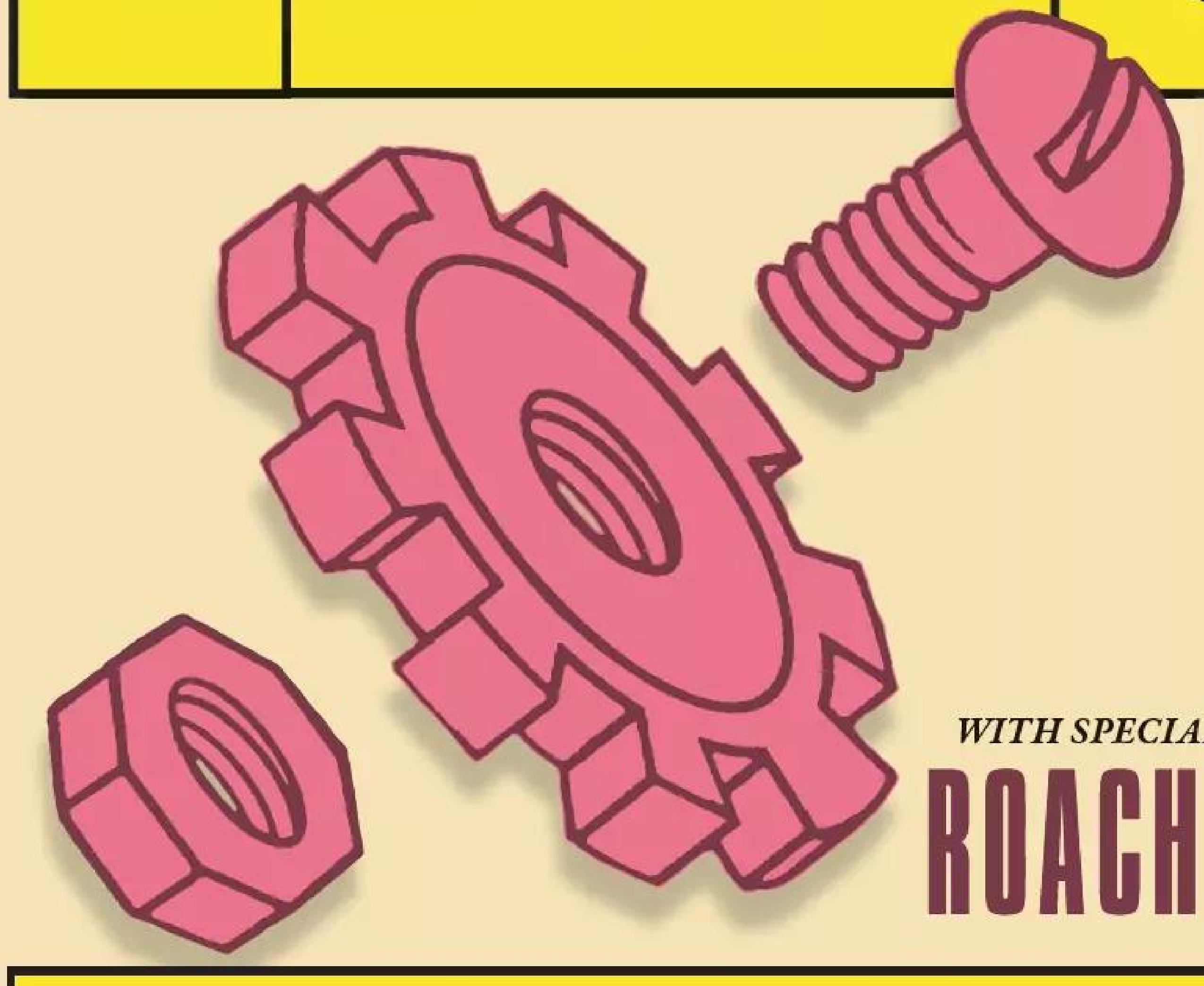

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M

NEW YORK-LONDON-PARIS-MUNICH

Recently rediscovered by the TikTok generation, 1979's *Pop Muzik* was the effervescent highlight, a decade into his career, of Robin Scott's debut album as M. With a new LP finally due this summer, it's time to revisit *New York-London-Paris-Munich*.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

If M's irresistible, evergreen *Pop Muzik* seemed to come out of nowhere in 1979, it came from everywhere, too. A witty, breathless fusion of disco, New Wave and synth-pop, its knowing musical and lyrical references also incorporated a quarter century of further subgenres. There were tributes to The Rolling Stones and The Beatles – "I can't get 'Jumping Jack'/ I want to hold 'Get Back'" – as well as boogie and doo-wop, and the song even nodded to a nursery rhyme, the enduring *This Old Man*.

"It was ephemeral, very much a reflection on pop culture in general," M's mastermind, Robin Scott, tells *CP* of its emergence in the wake of punk. "The idea was a homage to pop music as I saw it, from '54, when Elvis leapt onto the scene, to 1979."

He certainly knew plenty about his subject. By the time it reached No.2 in the UK Top 40 – kept off the top by Art Garfunkel's *Bright Eyes* – he was 32, a far from fledgling musician.

Scott had always been well connected. He'd studied alongside Malcolm McLaren, through whom he'd met Vivienne Westwood, and, after performances on television and radio, he'd released his debut album in 1969. The folksy *Woman From The Warm Grass* was partly recorded with Mighty Baby, who'd also backed Sandy Denny, but if his label quickly went bankrupt, commercial failure did little to dissuade him. "I was out in the cold," Scott recalls, "and thought, 'I'm going to have to deal with this'. I started to explore other areas within the business."

He continued touring folk clubs, opening for John Martyn and David Bowie, but also demoed with Camel and Terry Britten (co-writer of *What's Love Got To Do With It*) while playing live with other acts. By the early 70s, he'd won EMI's *Search For A Star* talent competition with his group, Zeta Flix, but if he pocketed the £500 prize he turned down a deal because it didn't include his bandmates. Instead, he proceeded with *The Voice*, a multimedia project broadcast by BBC Radio 3, but production on his next endeavour, a comic strip musical called *Heartaches & Teardrops,* was halted by contractual problems.

Nothing, however, could deter Scott, and in 1977, with Ian Tregoning, later Yello's manager, and Tregoning's brother, Max, he helped set up Do It Records. The label was partially intended for Roogalator, his brother Julian's R&B band, whom he now managed, and whose first album he'd produce once Virgin and Stiff Records had both dropped them. It would also release Adam And The Ants' debut long-player, 1979's *Dirk Wears White Sox,* but Scott himself had already returned to vinyl a year earlier, as Comic Romance, with 1978's *Cry Myself To Sleep,* a relic from his aborted theatrical venture.

Ultimately it was a move to Paris that precipitated the birth of M. He'd gone there with director Julien Temple to help record The Slits in concert, then taken up a role as a producer for France's renowned Barclay Records. "I discovered I had a bit of a flair," he smiles. "There were artists approaching me, but I wasn't really taking myself seriously. I wanted to play all these different roles."

He began mapping out a new studio project, named M after the signs in the French capital's Metro. Its inductees were his bassist brother Julian, keyboardist Wally Badarou (known later for his close association with Level 42), backing vocalist and girlfriend Brigit Novik – whom he'd met after she was last to leave a Parisian dancefloor – and John Lewis, a programmer and composer with a studio in Covent Garden. "He had a lot of the cutting edge electronic paraphernalia," Scott informs *Classic Pop.* "That's what gave it that very unusual sound. John was an essential part of the picture."

> "IT WAS VERY MUCH A REFLECTION ON CULTURE. THE IDEA WAS A HOMAGE TO POP MUSIC AS I SAW IT, FROM '54, WHEN ELVIS LEAPT ONTO THE SCENE, TO 1979."

M's first outing was a 7", *Moderne Man* b/w *Satisfy Your Lust,* released in 1978 to little fanfare (though orchestrally rearranged for the later album). Fortunately, Scott was already busy perfecting *Pop Muzik,* trying it out in different styles with Lewis, whose own organ fanfare opens the song. Its peak incarnation was released in March 1979, and its success was fuelled by a video directed by Brian Grant.

Playing an extravagant DJ, tossing away records from behind his decks, he was celebrating pop as an art form as much as satirising its disposable nature. "When I put those lyrics together," he says, "I was in France, wandering around the supermarkets, and Muzak was more prevalent there. It's the wallpaper of the time, a stream of consciousness of our culture."

This same mindset helped shape what eventually made up *New York-London-Paris-Munich. Woman Make Man,* another bubbly synth-pop number with a hint of Kraftwerk, pithily questioned gender roles, and *Made In Munich* offered jovial appreciation for Giorgio Moroder's command of the dancefloor. The admittedly more frivolous *Cowboys And Indians* cast a wry look at American folklore, while *Unite Your Nation* paired his 60s idealism with Europop.

He also took another shot at consumerism on the corporation-baiting *Moonlight And Muzak*, which, he told *NME*'s Danny Baker around its release as M's next single, "is what my music will be used for, and there's not an awful lot I can do about it." Nonetheless, it hit No.33 in January 1980, and only *That's The Way The Money Goes*, the album's final single, fell short of the charts.

The album itself had been recorded, after a chance meeting with Roger Taylor, in Queen's Mountain Studios in Montreux. The setting also enabled Scott to rekindle a friendship with Bowie, who lived nearby. According to Scott's liner notes in a 1993 Spanish compilation, he contributed "handclaps and horseplay" to *Moonlight And Muzak*, but the album wasn't all fun and games.

"It was quite hard work, actually," Scott concedes. "There was a lot of pressure with [*Pop Muzik*] still bouncing around the world. I had a lot of balls in the air, and I wasn't trusting anybody to the degree that you need to. It wasn't a great experience."

In fact, he never even anticipated success. "I can't say I see much the LP can achieve in this country," he admitted to Baker in 1980. "It seems that there's a kind of inherent lacking in our music scene, that anything which appears throwaway or humorous is dismissed as trite or crass."

Years later, though, he laughs at the words. "I'm surprised to have heard myself having said that. That sounds quite prophetic. I'll claim that."

He does so secure in the knowledge that, almost half a century on, his 'muzik' has lasted twice as long as the music he first set out to eulogise. "The built in obsolescence," he chuckles, contented, "didn't work!"

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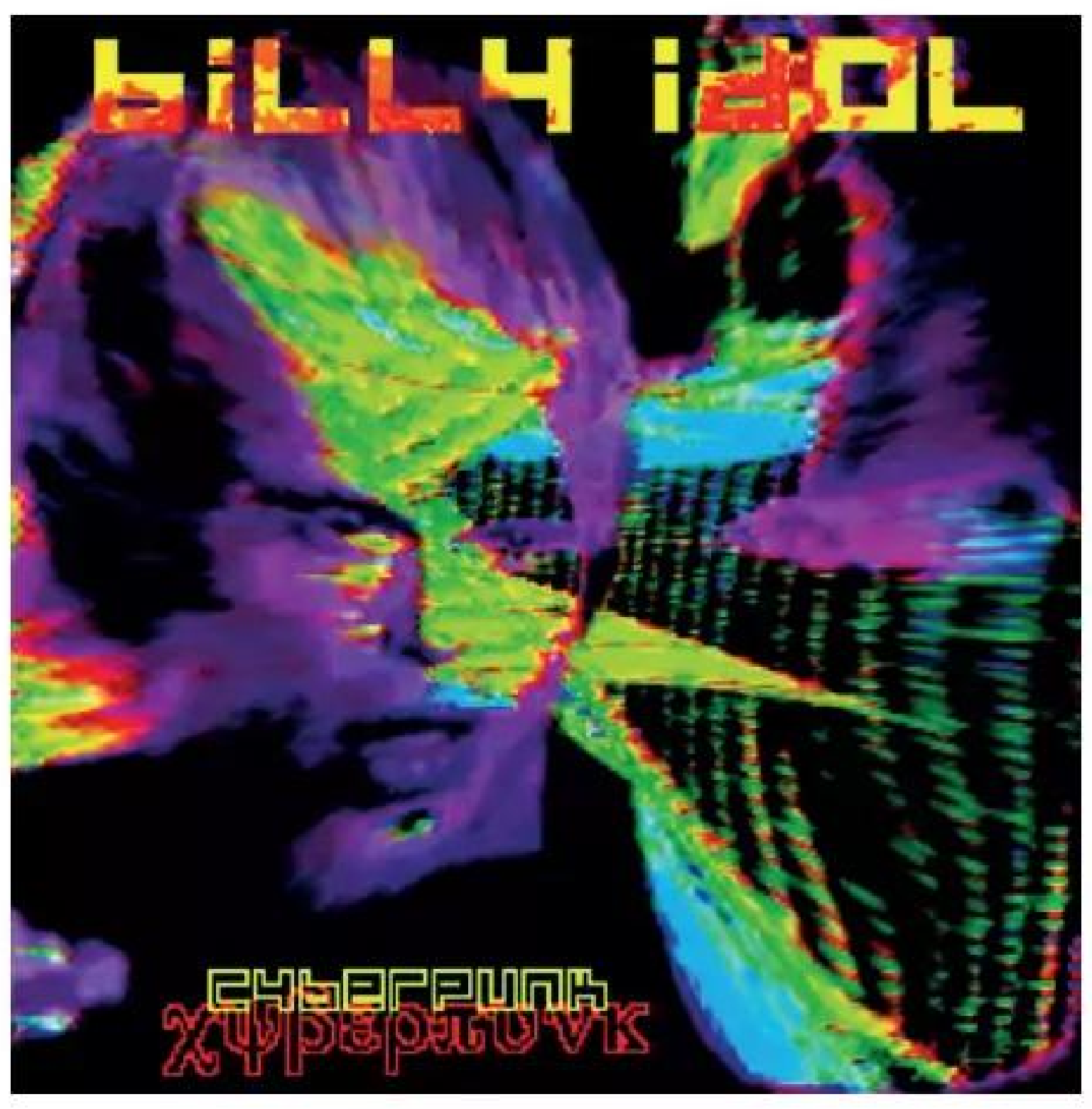
TOP 20
POP CONCEPT ALBUMS

First conceived in the 1960s, concept albums changed the way we listened to music, and they continue to inspire new generations of artists, as our latest rundown confirms

BARRY PAGE

The idea that a collection of songs should be listened to collectively rather than individually has certainly divided music lovers and critics over the years, and the concept album is seen by many as an emblem of bombast and pretension – a signifier of excessive hubris and overblown ambition. But it's a format that has continued to thrive since its commercial pinnacle in the 1970s, one that has afforded many artists and bands to realise their creative aspirations via a unifying theme or narrative. With a rule of one record per act, here are 20 thematic pop albums that transcend both musical genres and eras.



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BILLY IDOL

CYBERPUNK (1993)

After seriously injuring his leg in a motorcycle accident, Billy Idol immersed himself in cyberpunk fiction during his rehabilitation and conceived the idea of basing an album around a dystopian narrative. Negating the need for expensive studios, his *Cyberpunk* LP was recorded remotely using computers, a DIY idea that appealed to the former punk rocker, and with the internet in its infancy he also realised the possibilities of email communication and online fan communities.

BUGGLES
THE AGE OF PLASTIC

19

THE BUGGLES

THE AGE OF PLASTIC (1980)

Nerdy prog lovers, The Buggles were the unlikeliest of post-punk popstars. The visionary writings of J.G. Ballard were a huge influence, with songs touching on media saturation, mass surveillance and robotic companionship, while big hit *Video Killed The Radio Star* was a nostalgic rumination on a bygone era. Their futuristic sounds aligned perfectly with the group's dystopian fantasies, but they also realised the music industry was on the verge of an audiovisual revolution.

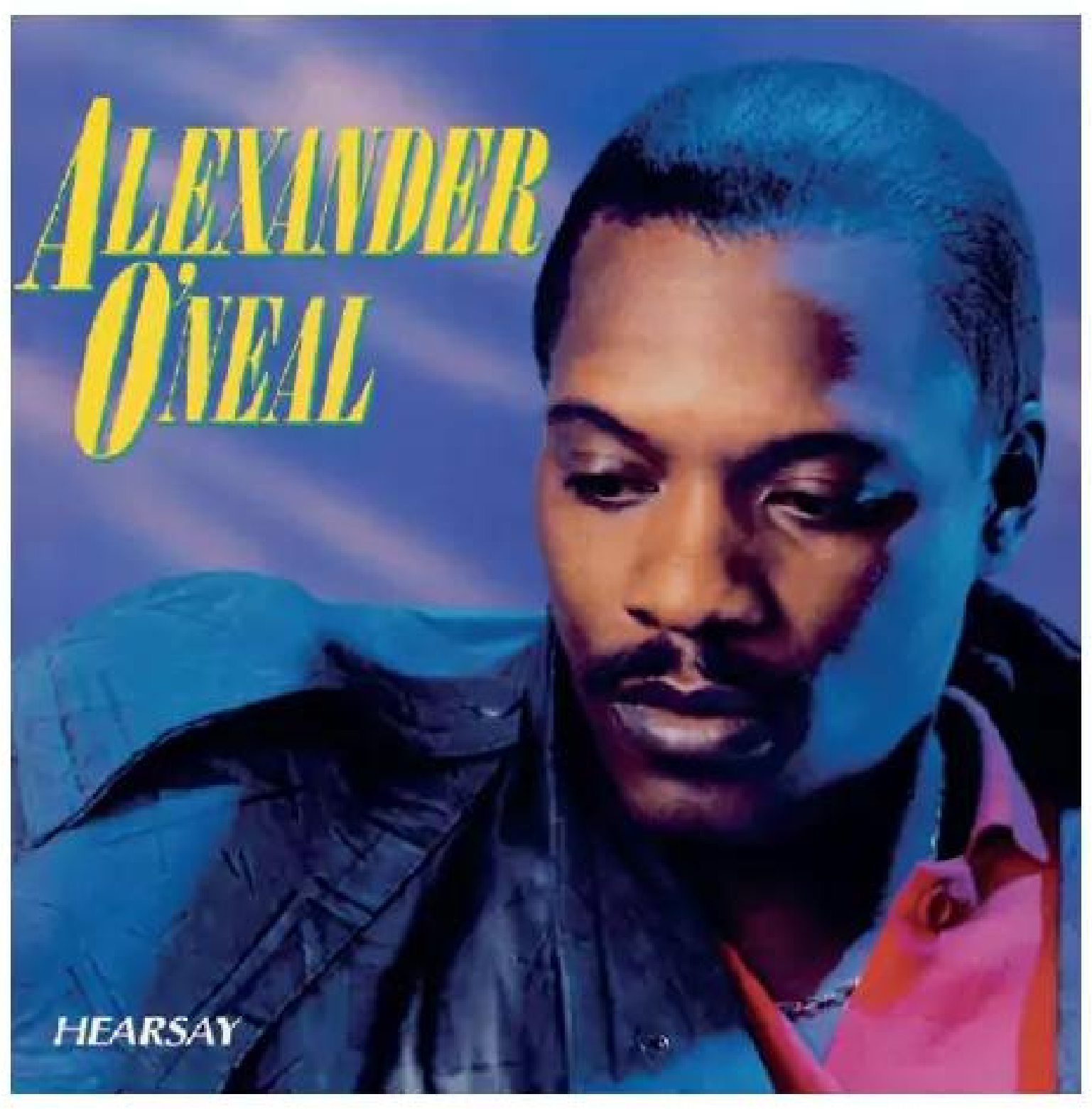
PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING
THE RACE FOR SPACE

18

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

THE RACE FOR SPACE (2015)

There's room for more than one PSB in our pages, and this is an album that readers may just love to the moon and back. Their music – an indefinable blend of minimalist electro-pop, ambience and indie rock – has been feted in both progressive rock and classical musical circles. Utilising audio samples from the BFI and NASA, the erudite act's second studio album tells the story of the American-Soviet space race in a unique way.

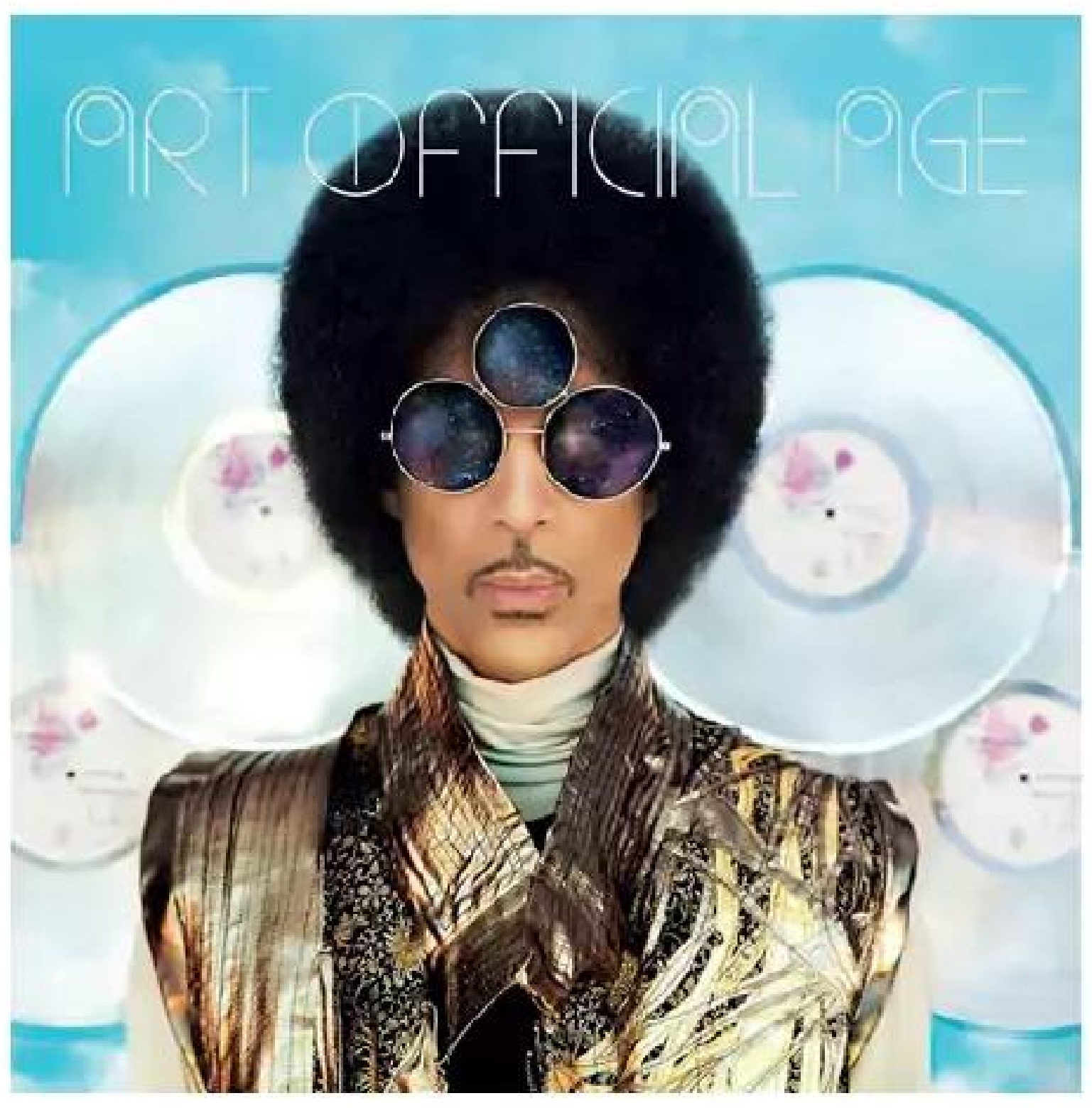


17

ALEXANDER O'NEAL

HEARSAY (1987)

Fresh from their success with Janet Jackson and The Human League, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis devised a concept album with Minneapolis buddy O'Neal that envisaged the debonair singer as the amorous host of a house party. It's an unconventional listen, its flow interrupted by musical interludes and scene-setting snatches of dialogue from a cast of revellers and gossipmongers, but it spawned several hits, including UK Top 5 smash *Criticize*.



16

PRINCE

ART OFFICIAL AGE (2014)

True to his prolificacy, Prince released two albums in 2014, both under licence to Warners, the label he once declared he'd been a slave to. In a deal that included ownership of his masters, *Art Official Age* signalled a commercial rebirth and spiritual awakening. A futurist electro-funk LP based on the idea that, after 45 years in suspended animation, he'd woken in a world that "does not require time", where people communicate telepathically and dividing words like "me or mine" don't exist.

MYLO XYLOTO

15

COLDPLAY

MYLO XYLOTO (2011)

Centred on two lovers and their rebellion against a totalitarian government, Coldplay's fifth studio album was an ambitious rock opera that utilised a broad palette of contemporary sounds. Encouraging the band to experiment, Brian Eno helped craft the tracks. "He's like Gandalf," Chris Martin told *Mojo*. "He comes in, weaves all his magic, causes chaos, then disappears. Then he comes back, and he's been to Kazakhstan to learn about horseback wrestling." Now that's a concept.

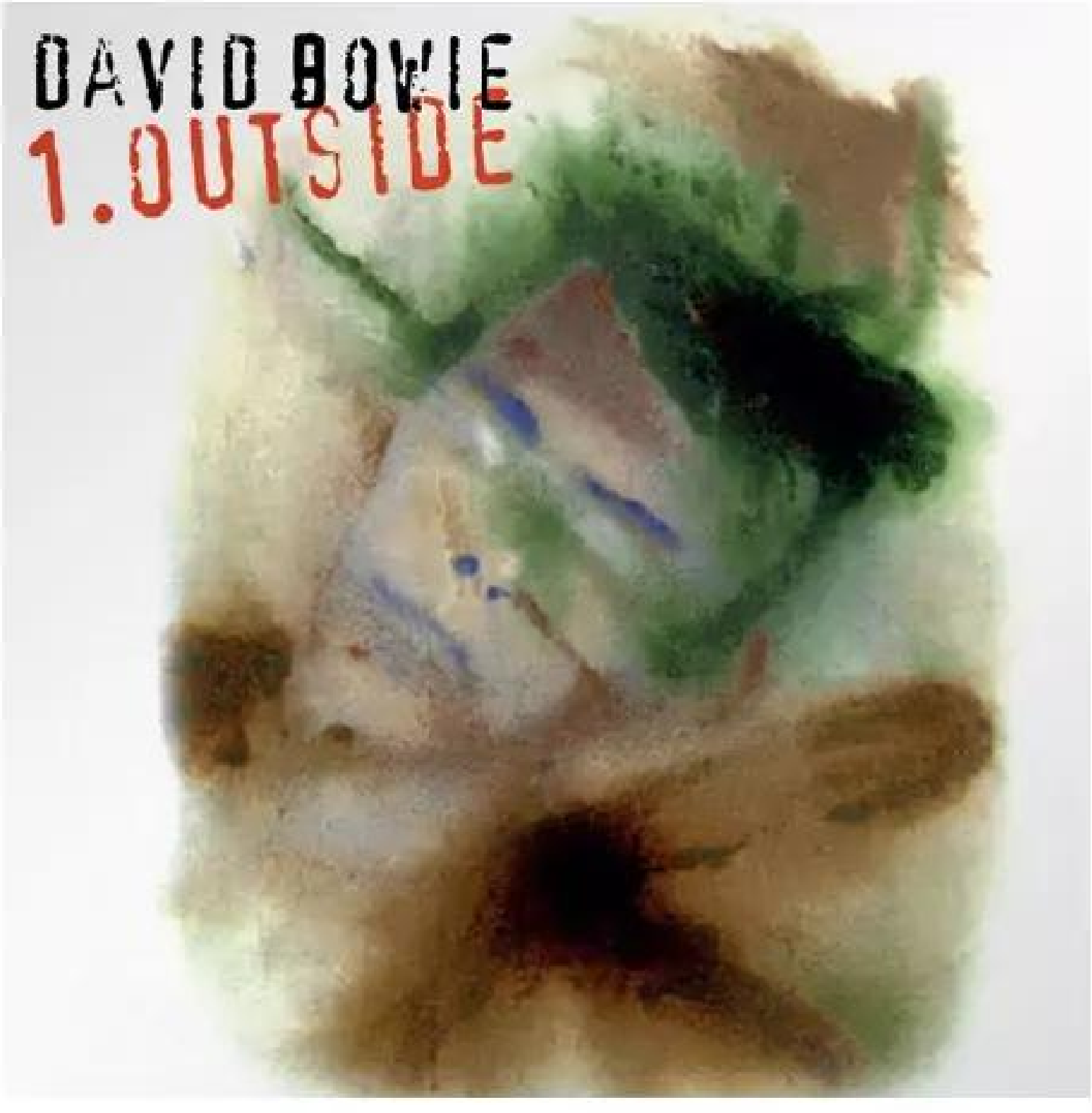
DURAN DURAN
Danse Macabre

14

DURAN DURAN

DANSE MACABRE (2023)

Upon realising the second of two scheduled Las Vegas shows fell on Halloween, Nick Rhodes pushed for Duran Duran to play a unique set that night, incorporating new songs, covers and deep cuts that adhered to a supernatural theme. Thus, a concept for their 16th studio album was born, which included guest appearances from former guitarists Andy Taylor and Warren Cuccurullo. Released on Simon Le Bon's 65th birthday, with a suitable eerie vintage séance photo adorning the sleeve, it's ghoulishly good fun.

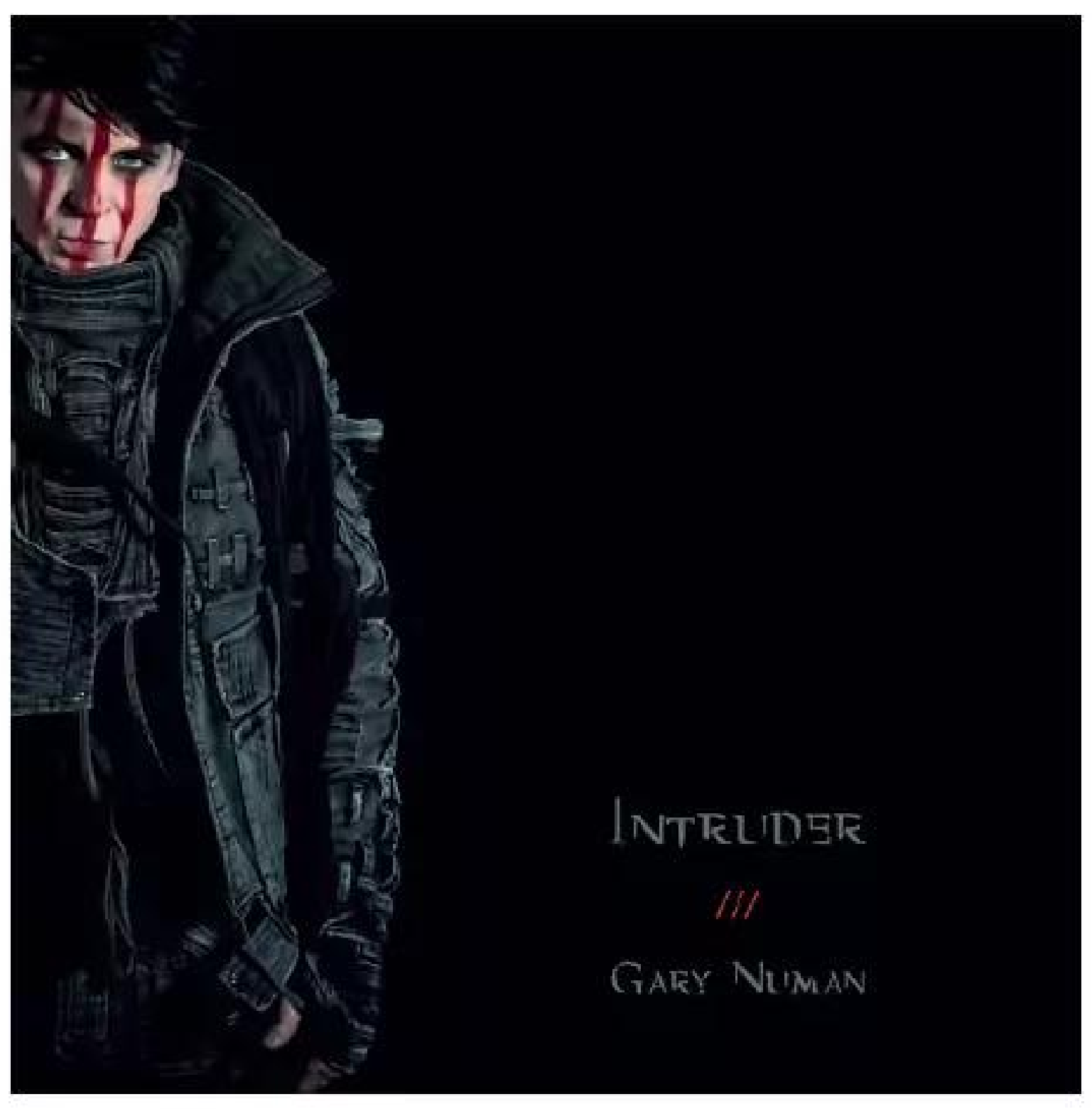


13

DAVID BOWIE

OUTSIDE (1995)

After reuniting with Brian Eno – who once again deployed his Oblique Strategies cards as a way of inducing creativity – David Bowie crafted one of the most challenging albums of his career. The singer adopted an array of personas to reflect a fractured storyline centered on a murder in a fictional town, à la *Twin Peaks*. A radical Pet Shop Boys mix of *Hallo Spaceboy* became a hit, with Neil Tennant reintroducing Major Tom, who he imagined as being stuck on an abandoned Russian spaceship.



12

GARY NUMAN

INTRUDER (2021)

While the *Savage* LP painted a vivid picture of a post-apocalyptic Earth, for the follow-up Numan conceptualised a set of songs from the viewpoint of a planet decimated by climate change. "If Earth could speak, and feel things the way we do, what would it say?" he pondered. "The songs, for the most part, attempt to be that voice." Much of the album was written prior to the pandemic, *The Gift* a biting late addition, chillingly surmising that the coronavirus was Mother Nature's revenge on humankind.

GRACE JONES / SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM

11

GRACE JONES

SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM (1985)

Following her appearance as Bond villain May Day in *A View To A Kill*, Grace Jones returned to the day job, lending her vocal talents to several interpretations of a song originally earmarked for Frankie Goes To Hollywood. The broad range of musical styles afforded Trevor Horn the opportunity to showcase his studio skills, but crucially the project served as a billet-doux to the charismatic chanteuse, weaving in extracts from the Jean-Paul Goude biography *Jungle Fever*.

Gorillaz
Plastic Beach

10

GORILLAZ

PLASTIC BEACH (2010)

Damon Albarn first conceived the idea for the third Gorillaz album after spotting plastic on a beach near his Devon home, but the title was derived from the moniker given to Hawaii's infamous Kamilo Beach, on account of its high volume of marine waste. Having envisioned themselves as inhabitants of a rubbish-infested island named Point Nemo, the virtual act enlisted a jaw-dropping array of guest stars to get their message across, which is fortunately fun and playful, rather than downbeat and preachy.

Kate Bush
Aerial

09

KATE BUSH

AERIAL (2005)

With Kate Bush prioritising motherhood over the release of new material, the follow-up to *The Red Shoes* wouldn't arrive for 12 years, but the wait was certainly worth it. Most fans and critics' ears were tuned into the stunning *Sky Of Honey* song cycle in the second half, in which Kate utilised poetic panoramas to describe a beautiful summer's day. With birdsong and other effects enhancing the pastoral ambience, the dreamlike suite was emblematic of her domestic bliss and marked a new creative peak.

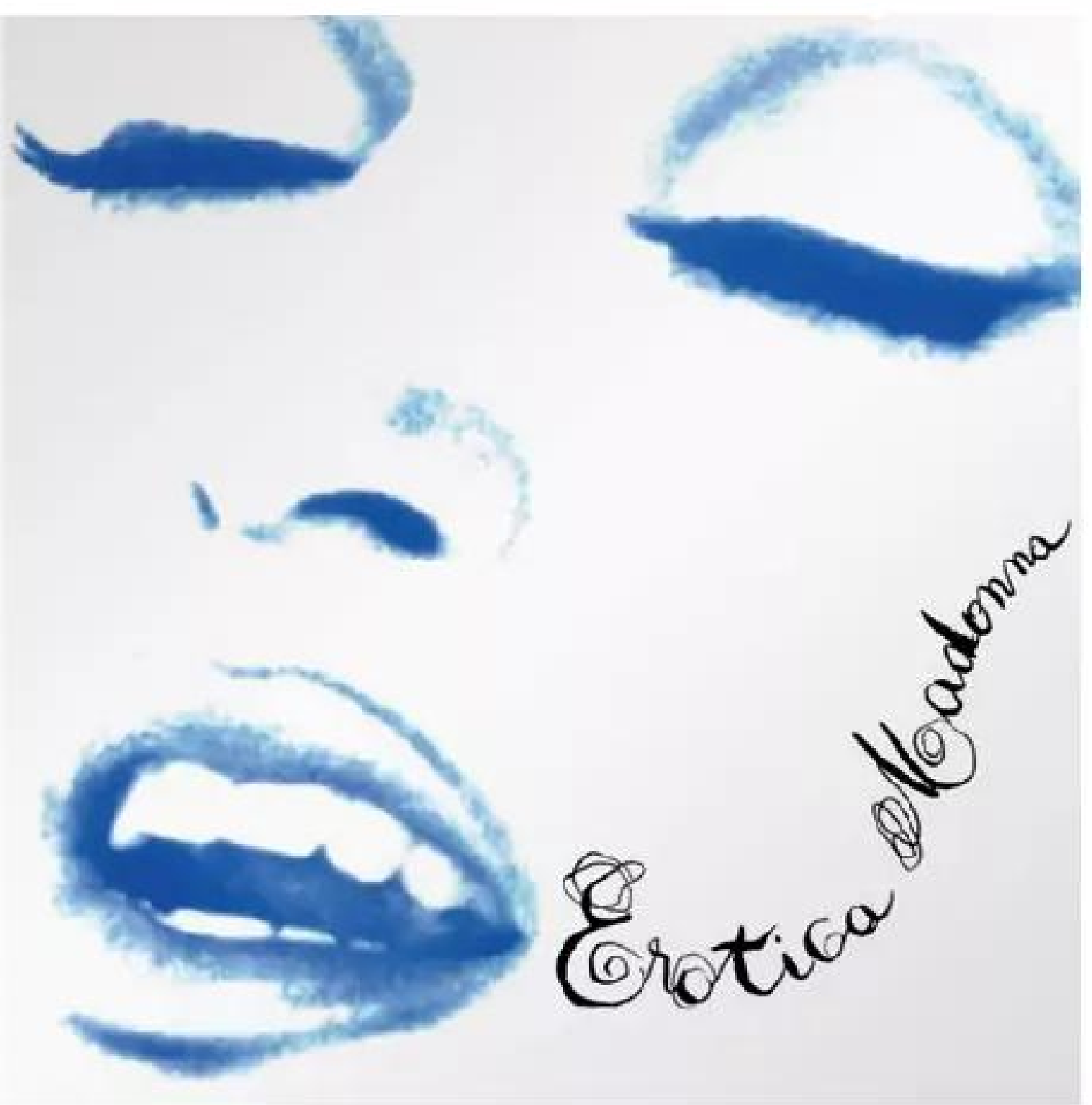
Donna Summer
Once Upon A Time...

08

DONNA SUMMER

ONCE UPON A TIME (1977)

Crafted by Giorgio Moroder and his expert team, this was the quick-fire follow-up to *I Remember Yesterday*, which spawned the seminal *I Feel Love*. In tandem with her management, the Queen of Disco devised the fantastical rags-to-riches storyline, in which a working girl yearns for a better life outside of a bustling metropolis and eventually falls in love. A modern day retelling of *Cinderella*, the ambitious double album was also evocative of her own struggles as a young woman.

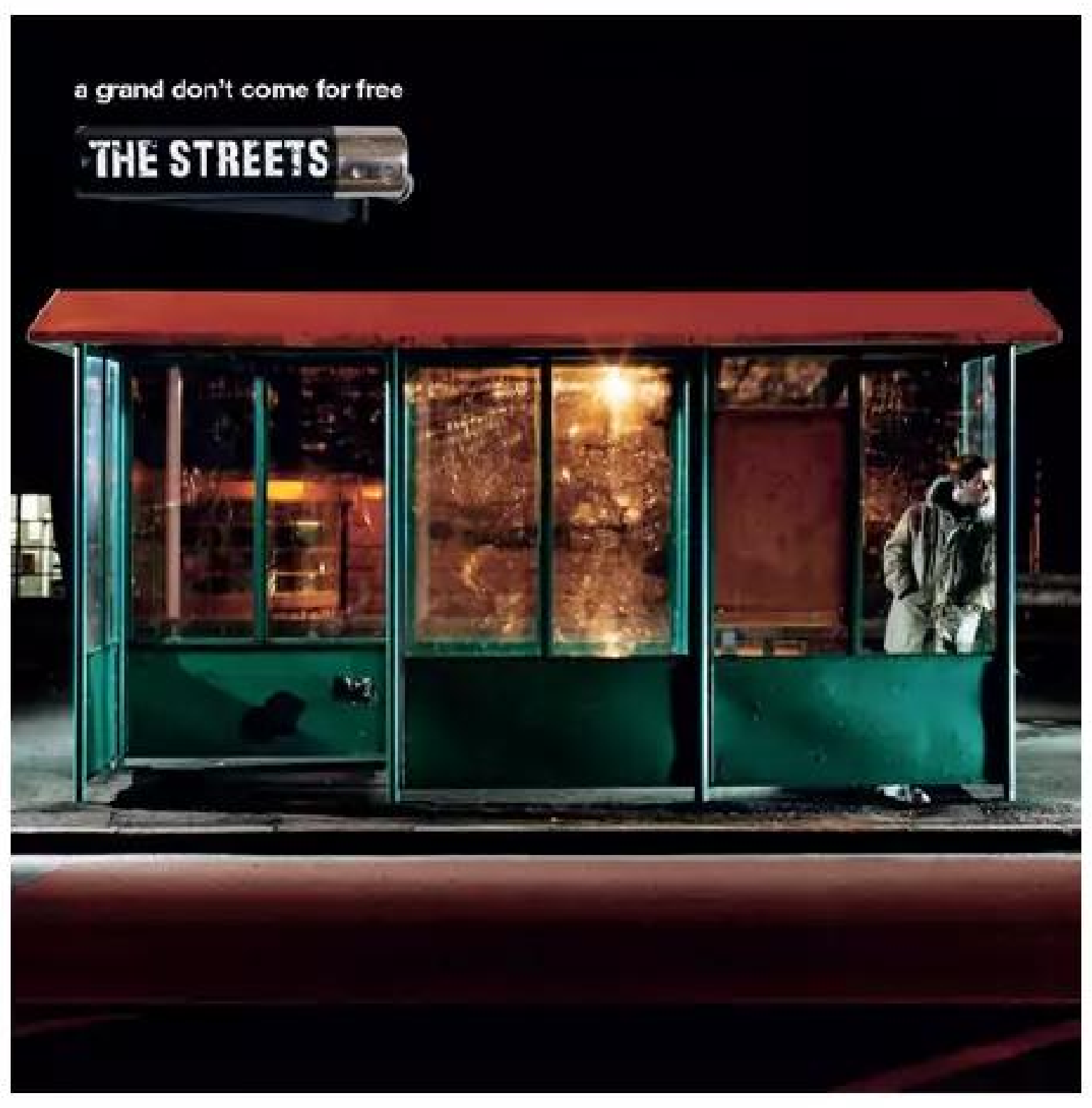


07

MADONNA

EROTICA (1992)

Ever the provocateur, Madonna caused a media sensation with the publication of her *Sex* book. It's become intrinsically linked with the simultaneously released *Erotica* album, which, despite several significant hits, was overshadowed by the hugely controversial tome. Certainly, her fantasies fed into the record, but its intersecting themes of love, heartache, and loss – emerging in an era when the stigma of HIV/AIDS was omnipresent – have assured its status as a cultural touchstone.

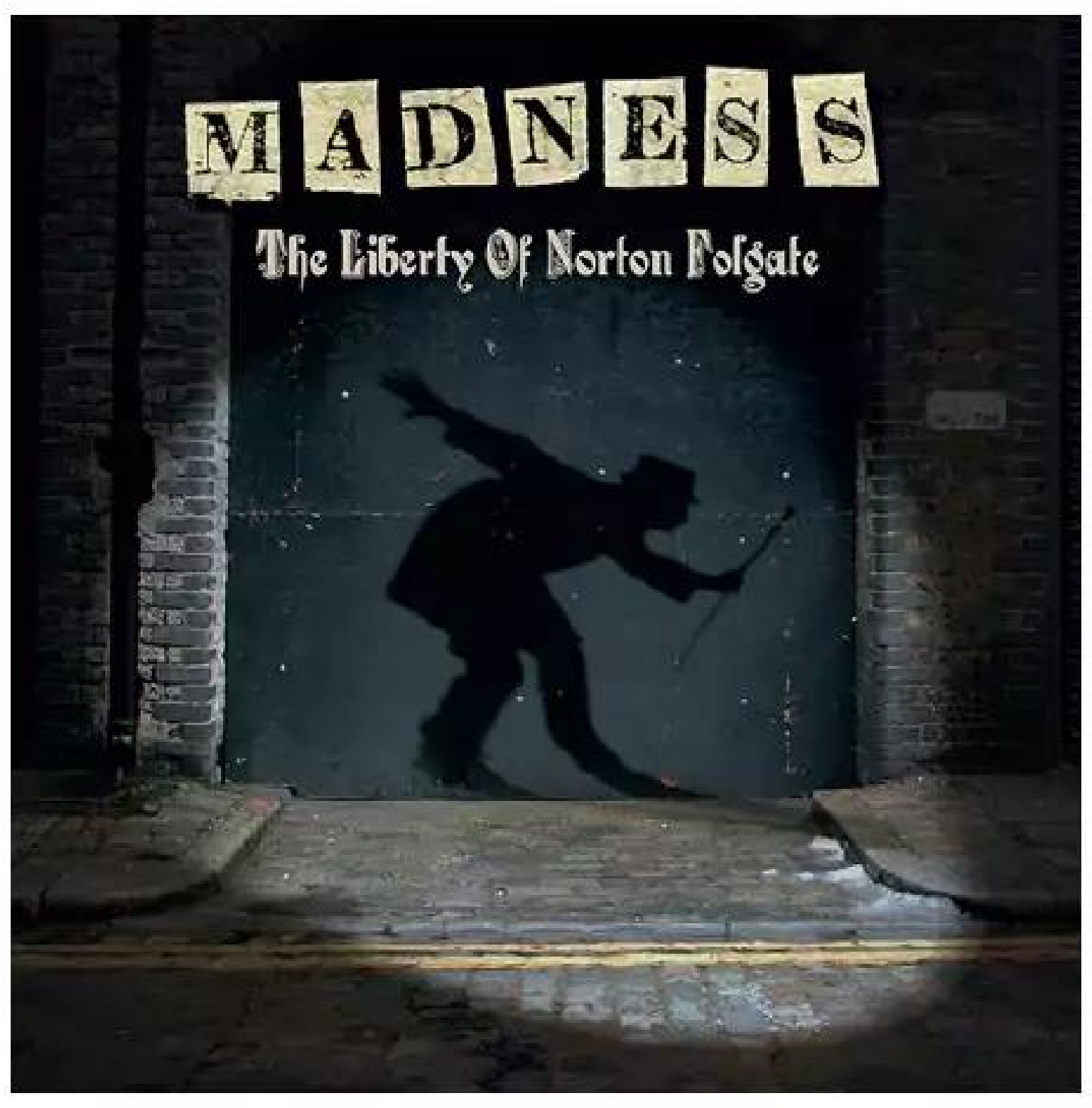


06

THE STREETS

A GRAND DON'T COME FOR FREE (2004)

The protagonist of this chart-topper has "achieved absolutely nowt"; his savings have disappeared, his TV's on the blink, his phone battery's dead and he's failed to return a DVD rental, but things are looking up in his love life. It's a flimsy premise, but in his role as the hapless geezer, Mike Skinner skilfully turns it into an engrossing and often hilarious urban odyssey. Warmly embraced by the hip-hop community, it served as a timeless piece of social commentary.

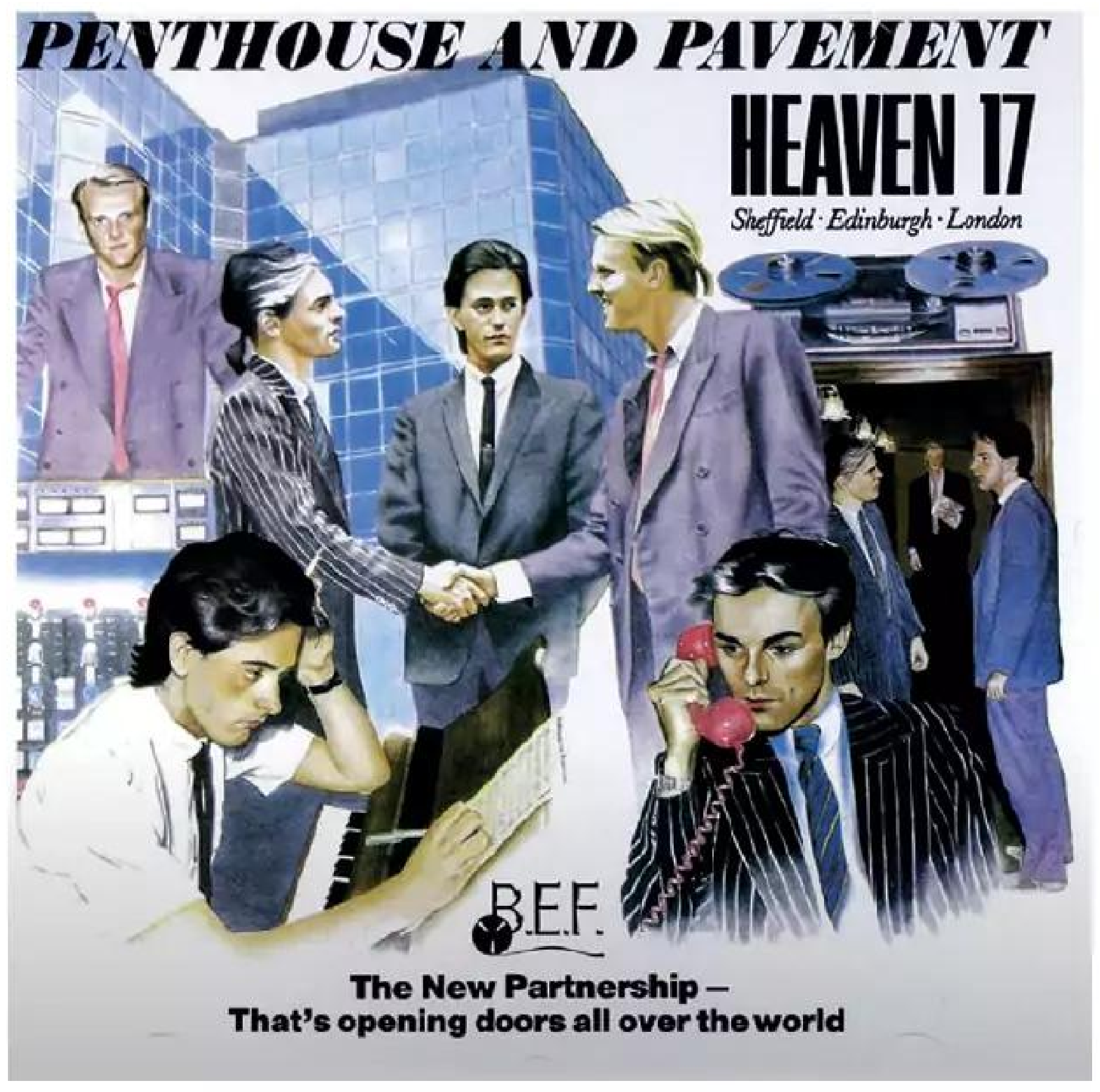


05

MADNESS

THE LIBERTY OF NORTON FOLGATE (2009)

Madness had been writing about London throughout their career, but this late-period classic was the closest they came to using the capital as its central premise. Embracing its diversity and culture, the deep-rooted history was celebrated in the epic title track, inspired by a strip of land in Spitalfields and Shoreditch once free of governance. "All the tracks are interlinked by the fact that we live in a complicated city of never-ending stories and change," Suggs told *Uncut* magazine.


PENTHOUSE AND PAVEMENT
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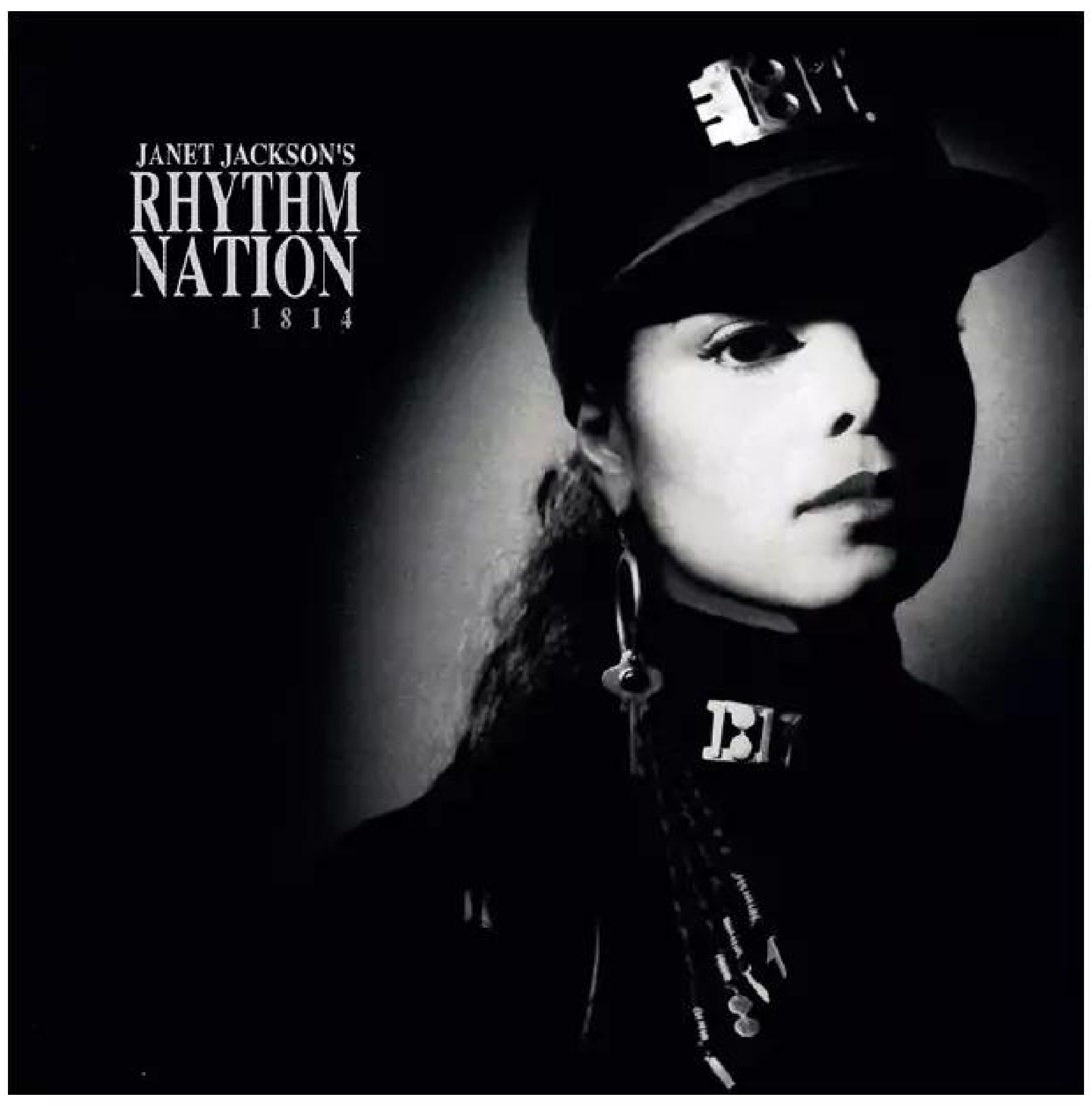
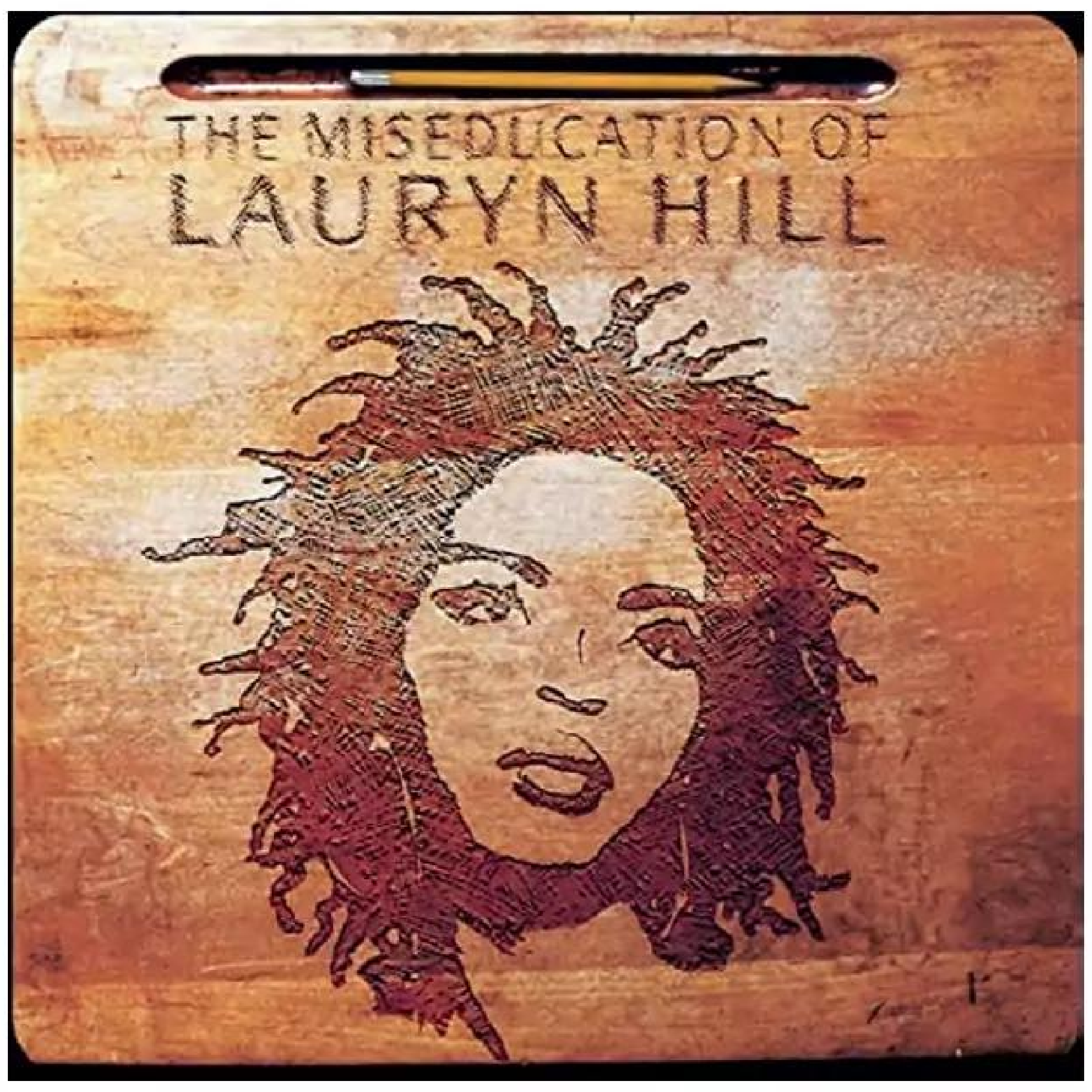




04

HEAVEN 17
PENTHOUSE AND PAVEMENT (1981)

Heaven 17 cut their debut album at the same studio The Human League were concurrently recording, but while *Dare* may have emerged as the sales victor, *Penthouse And Pavement* was far more audacious. Informed by the band's left-wing leanings, this was a consciously political work, with *(We Don't Need This) Fascist Groove Thang* setting the tone. Elsewhere, the trio touch upon Cold War paranoia, nuclear disarmament, capitalism, and the burgeoning yuppy culture, the sleeve depicting them as sharp-suited businessmen.

03

JANET JACKSON
RHYTHM NATION 1814 (1989)

Janet Jackson's career had been revitalised by the hit-packed *Control* album, but she resisted calls to repeat its chart-winning formula, instead devising a concept that touched on the social issues of the day, including gun violence, poverty and racism. Buying into her vision was the returning production team of Jam and Lewis, whose broad musical palette was equally progressive. Concerned record label chiefs were appeased with a number of lighter songs in the second half of the strategically sequenced LP, which spawned four US No.1s.

02

LAURYN HILL
THE MISEDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL (1998)

Once her survival instincts kicked in during her first pregnancy, former Fugee Lauryn Hill's life was brought into sharp focus, precipitating a burst of creativity. In a startling, genre-hopping solo set that encompassed hip-hop, soul, R&B, gospel and reggae, Hill cast herself as a teacher of life lessons, using past experiences to deliver songs of faith and spirituality, love and devotion, and heartbreak and betrayal, while interwoven classroom skits pondered emotional perception.

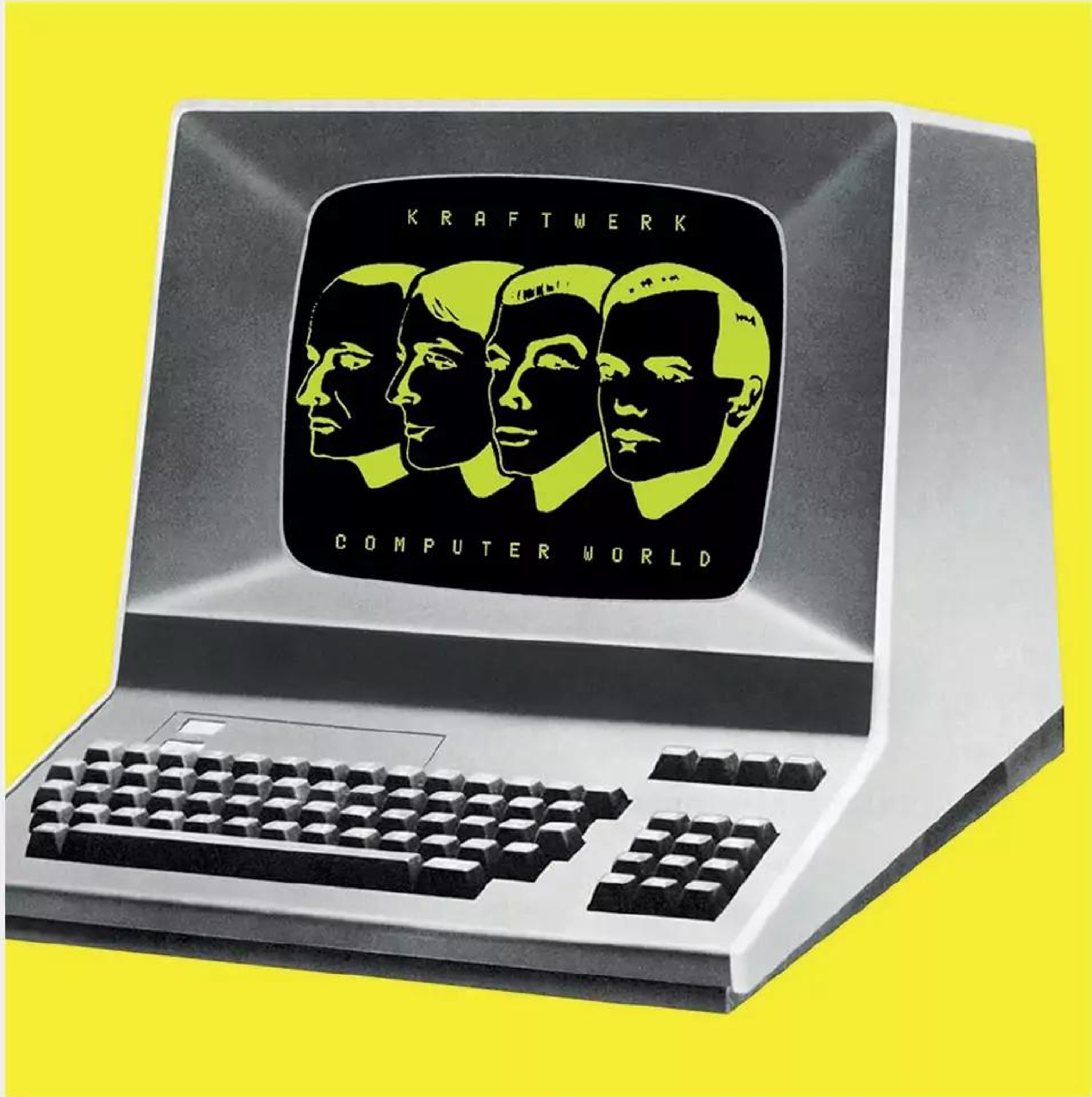
01

KRAFTWERK
COMPUTER WORLD (1981)

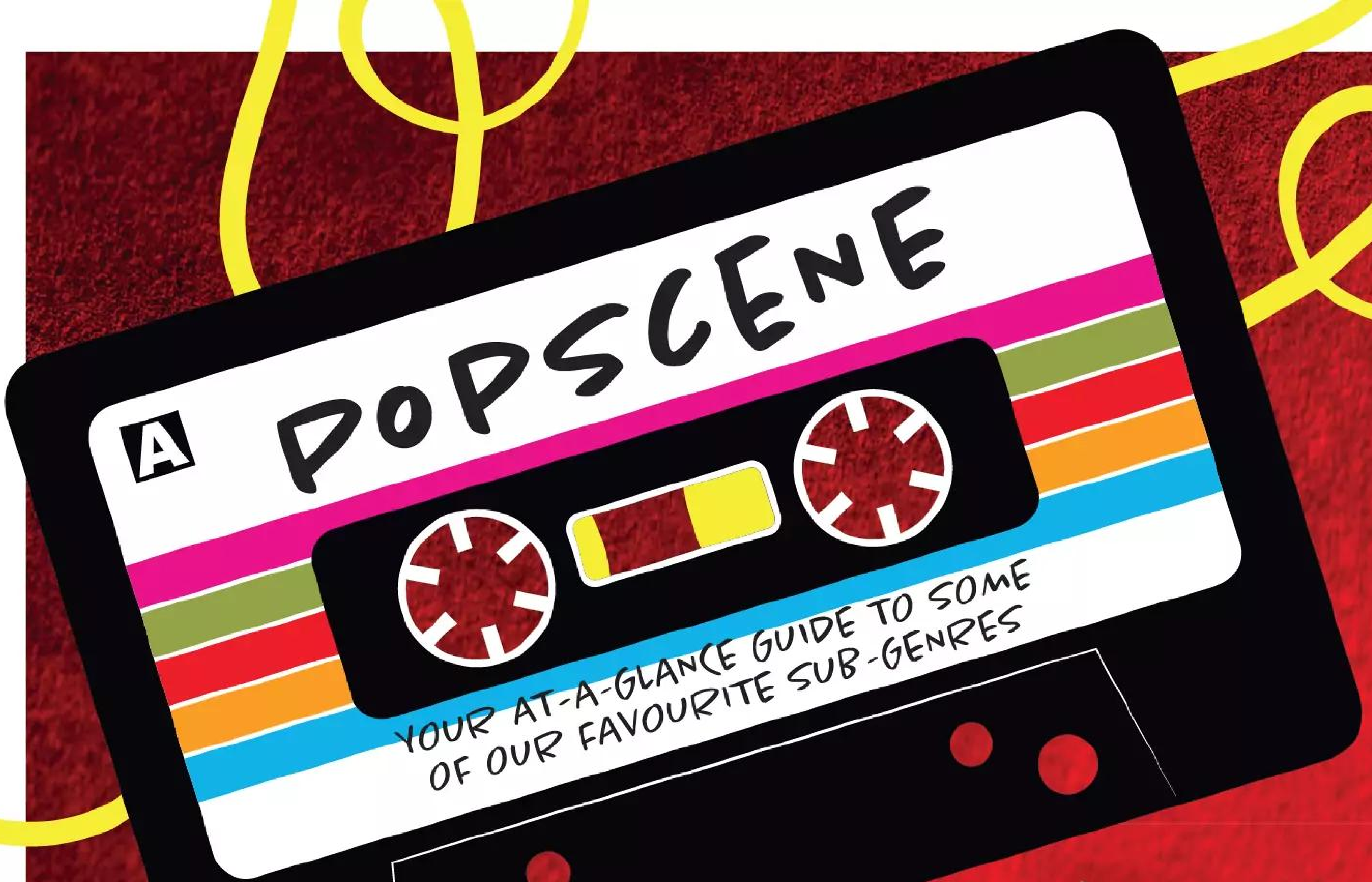
Enthralled and inspired by the science fiction that was permeating our television sets and cinemas in the late 70s and early 80s, we loved pressing down little keys on fashionable gadgets. In the classroom, pocket calculators were commonplace and digital watches were becoming increasingly gimmicky. Handheld electronic games were all the rage, while video consoles and home computers were becoming increasingly affordable. A technological future was fast unfolding before our eyes, and Kraftwerk were tapping into the zeitgeist.

Emblematic of their visionary artistry, eighth album *Computer World* found Düsseldorf's finest beaming themselves into the future, providing a prescient glimpse into a new technological epoch, in which they chillingly envisioned the societal implications of a high-tech infrastructure. The single *Computer Love* notably pre-empted the 21st century phenomenon of dating sites, while the title track touched on Orwellian themes of mass surveillance. "Society was being computerised, a lot of people didn't notice at that time but we did, "Ralf Hütter told *Uncut* magazine. "Computers were being used by states, the KGB, Interpol, Deutsche Bank."

Hugely influential, this was Kraftwerk at their artistic and commercial peak – though the fast-evolving technology that the erudite quartet so sagely warned us about would ultimately derail their career. ■



HUGELY INFLUENTIAL, THIS WAS KRAFTWERK AT THEIR ARTISTIC AND COMMERCIAL PEAK


A
POPSCENE
YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SUB-GENRES

BIG BEAT

THE HEAVY-HITTING DANCE MUSIC THAT WAS THE UBIQUITOUS SOUNDTRACK TO HALF OF THE 90s

STEVE O'BRIEN

> "[Big beat] started as a breath of fresh air, exciting and liberating, and ended up like the loud, annoying drunken bloke you really wish would leave the party."
>
> DAMIAN HARRIS, AS QUOTED IN THE GUARDIAN

Mint Royale
presents
DEAD BEAT
45rpm

Fatboy Slim
The Rockafeller Skank

Lo Fidelity Allstars

What is it?

It's a sobering thought that the sounds of Big Beat are now nearly as bygone as Merseybeat was when Fatboy Slim, Propellerheads and Groove Armada burst onto the dance scene in the mid- to late 90s. If Britpop was guitar music's contribution to Cool Britannia, Big Beat was its blissed out, drugged up (and it definitely was up) sibling. Yet in the last years of the century, there was more crossover between the Britpop and dance crowds than there had ever been between rave and indie, that musical gap being bridged by collaborations such as Noel Gallagher, Paul Weller, Tim Burgess and James Dean Bradfield with The Chemical Brothers, Richard Ashcroft and Thom Yorke with U.N.K.L.E., Liam Gallagher with Death In Vegas.

If there's a genre that managed to bottle the heady optimism of the era, then it's more the party-ready sounds of *Battleflag*, *The Rockafeller Skank* or *Bentleys Gonna Sort You Out!* than *Country House*, *Common People* or *Sonnet*. Hell, Big Beat was so ubiquitous at the fag end of the 90s and the infant days of the Noughties that Channel Four used it as the theme for their new reality show *Big Brother* (courtesy of Elementfour, aka Paul Oakenfold and Andy Gray), while many of its signature bangers were cribbed for the blockbuster movies of their day (*Ya Mama* turns up in *Charlie's Angels*, *Busy Child*'s in *Gone In 60 Seconds* and *Spybreak!* soundtracks one of *The Matrix*'s money shot moments).

Big Beat summarises the spirit of the late 1990s every bit as much the art-school stylings of Blur and the lad rock of Oasis, so much so that Fatboy Slim was one of a small number of artists to perform at the closing ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics (playing *Right Here Right Now* and *The Rockafeller Skank*, naturally).

Twenty-three years on from Big Beat's defining moment – Brighton's 250,000-throng Big Beach Boutique II concert – its original fans have swapped ecstasy pills for multivitamins and traded the Big Beat shuffle for Pilates. For that generation, though, should they ever feel like reliving the most hedonistic moments from their youth, it's not *Urban Hymns* or *I Should Coco* they reach for, but *Decksandrumsandrockandroll* and *You've Come A Long Way, Baby*.

And while we're here, though there are strands of the scene in the works of The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy, they cut across multiple dance music genres. So here, we're zeroing in on the artists that are 100% undiluted, indisputably Big Beat. Buckle up...

FatBoy Slim

Essential artists

Fatboy Slim

Breaking through as one-quarter of The Housemartins, before bagging a No.1 (*Dub Be Good To Me*) with Beats International and then making music as Pizzaman and The Mighty Dub Katz, Norman Cook assumed his Fatboy Slim nom de plume in 1996 with his debut album *Better Living Through Chemistry*. Aside from his three LPs, he was the late 90s most in-demand remixer, helping Cornershop get to No.1 with his clubby reswizzle of *Brimful Of Asha*. He hasn't released an LP since 2004's *Palookaville*, but did put out a rare single in 2024, *Role Model*.

Propellerheads

Before they'd even released their first album, Bath-formed duo Propellerheads made waves with a danced-up cover of the theme to *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* for David Arnold's star-packed *Shaken & Stirred: The David Arnold James Bond Project* album. They stayed in the Bond world for their Shirley Bassey collab *History Repeating*, and also worked with Arnold on a track for the 1997 007 movie *Tomorrow Never Dies*. The only album, *Decksandrumsandrockandroll* duly followed in 1998 and sadly, by 2003, they were no more.

Bentley Rhythm Ace

Formed in 1995 by Richard March, formerly of Pop Will Eat Itself, and Mike Stokes, ex of Bugweed Centipede, BRA scored a Top 20 hit with their self-titled debut album, and one of Big Beat's seminal singles in the infectious (and annoyingly apostrophe-free) *Bentleys Gonna Sort You Out!*. They split shortly after the release of second album *For Your Ears Only*, only to reform a few years later.

Midfield General

Though to occasional fans, Fatboy Slim remains the figurehead of Big Beat, more committed dance-heads know that it was Damian Harris, aka Midfield General, who helped pave the way for Norman Cook's reinvention in the second half of the 90s. A prime architect of Big Beat, Harris was the owner of the genre's main label, Skint Records – home to Fatboy Slim, Bentley Rhythm Ace, Lo Fidelity Allstars, Hardknox, Freq Nasty and X-Press 2 among others.

Essential singles

MIDFIELD GENERAL
DEVIL IN SPORTS CASUAL

GROOVE ARMADA – *SUPERSTYLIN'*
MINT ROYALE – *DEADBEAT*
FATBOY SLIM – *THE ROCKAFELLER SKANK*
PROPELLERHEADS – *SPYBREAK!*
MIDFIELD GENERAL – *DEVIL IN SPORTS CASUAL*
LO FIDELITY ALLSTARS – *BATTLEFLAG*

Further listening

VARIOUS ARTISTS – *BIG BEATS (SONY)*

BIG BEATS
38 ESSENTIAL 90s ANTHEMS
THE PRODIGY / FATBOY SLIM / UNDERWORLD / BASEMENT JAXX
NEW ORDER / GROOVE ARMADA / MOBY + MORE

Essential albums

Propellerheads

Decksandrumsandrockandroll

PROPELLERHEADS

Alex Gifford and Will White's sole album as Propellerheads was nominated for the Mercury Music Prize in 1998, but lost out to Gomez's *Bring It On* (they were robbed). The duo seemed to be everywhere in the late 90s, tracks from this record turning up in *The Matrix* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*, while *History Repeating* was adopted as the theme tune to the television show *So Graham Norton*. Even Apple were impressed, selecting opening track *Take California* for their very first iPod commercial in 2001.

Fatboy Slim

You've Come A Long Way, Baby

FATBOY SLIM
YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

Fatboy Slim's debut offering *Better Living Through Chemistry* barely registered on the media Richter scale upon release in 1996. Two years later, its follow-up would peak at No.1 with all four of its singles going Top 10, while also winning Norman Cook a prestigious BRIT award. *The* party album of 1998, this sampledelic classic pilfered, as *Spin* pointed out, "sounds from just about everybody worth robbing, generating the kind of visceral thrills normally reserved for a wrestling match."

Various Artists

On the Floor At The Boutique

ON THE FLOOR AT THE BOUTIQUE

Masterminded by Fatboy Slim, this album (recorded live at Brighton's Big Beat Boutique) compiles 19 songs from a variety of artists in a non-stop mix. Sampling everyone from the Jungle Brothers and Cirrus to Michael Viner's Incredible Bongo Band, it's a virtual blueprint for the Big Beat sound, so much so that it spawned two follow-ups, with Volume II being driven by the Lo Fidelity Allstars and Volume III by Midfield General.

Lo Fidelity Allstars

How To Operate With A Blown Mind

Lo Fidelity ALLSTARS
HOW TO OPERATE WITH A BLOWN MIND

Noticeably rowdier and messier than Fatboy's more mass-appeal Big Beat offerings, Skint Records' Lo Fidelity Allstars sounded like , as *Entertainment Weekly* summed up at the time, "what would happen if a barking, beat-inspired goth fronted a shambling electronica band that dabbled in everything from drum-and-bass to hectic breakbeats." The band's most successful record (it peaked at No.15), it was listed at No.21 in the *NME*'s list of the best LPs of 1998, one position higher than *The Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill*. ■

POPARAZZI

READERS SHARE THEIR FAVOURITE PHOTOS AS THEY GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN PLANET POP

Send your Poparazzi pics now to **steve.harnell@anthem.co.uk**

LOUISE
WITH NEIL DANGERFIELD

"I met Louise at HMV Oxford Street on 24 May where she was signing copies of her latest album *Confessions*. She also played an acoustic set of five songs from the record and took part in a Q&A. As always, she spent so much quality time with each fan. I can't wait for her next tour!"

MASSIVE
WAGONS
NIGHT SKIES

JASON DONOVAN
WITH ADRIAN KEEBLE

"I'm pictured here with Jason when he played at the Poole Lighthouse on his Doin' Fine 25 Tour on 21 February this year. He's such a charming person, this is the third time that I've met him. The show was absolutely phenomenal. Luckily, there's an Encore Tour next year, too."

THOMAS DOLBY
WITH STEVEN COOPER

"I met Thomas Dolby while I was in London to see him in concert at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in August 2024. As I was on my way to my hotel, I passed the venue and he was getting out of his taxi. I was lucky enough to get a photo with him. He was brilliant, and signed the CD I had with me that I was listening to on the train."

MIDGE URE
WITH DAVID TWISSELL

"This photo was taken in February 2020 following Midge Ure's gig at Bath Forum as part of his 1980 Tour. A few of us diehard fans waited for him after the show and found him to be a really nice guy, taking time with each person to have programmes signed and pictures taken."

Shiiine On Weekender

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Reef. Sleeper. The Undertones. The Bluetones. Jesus Jones. The Soup Dragons. Space. Phil Hartnoll (Orbital). DJ Yoda.

Miles Hunt. Greg Wilson. Icicle Works. Kyle Falconer. David Gedge Duo. Northside. James Walsh. James Atkin. CUD. Senser. My Life Story. BMX Bandits. Gary Clail Soundsystem. Ian Prowse & Amsterdam. The Others. S*M*A*S*H. Ultrasound.

Aircooled. Pastel. The Dream Machine. Ellis Murphy. Deja Vega. Rats. The Spitfires. Cronin. Pastel Waves. The Stamp. Tommy Washington. Ambedo Blue. Nervous Twitch. The Black Jackals. Crushing Dolls. Lost Societies Die. Jessie Morrell.

TRIBUTES. The Clone Roses. Oaces. Pure Weller. The Britpop Union. Manchester Anthems. **RESIDENTS DJS.** Steve Lamacq. Andy Bush. Adam Ficek. Star Shaped. A Deeper Groove. Supercool Indie Night. Bad Habit Soundsystem. The Spinout Revue. Menagerie. Little Indie Night. Lee Howe. Danny Bowden. Noel Malaga. Tam Coyle. Steve Wood. Listen Up. Keep it Social. Alan Leach Quiz.
IN CONVERSATION : Jonn Penney (Neds). Simon Spence. The Bleek Man. Sarah L Dixon. Pool Parties. Cinema Screenings Hip Hop Karaoke. Indie Karaoke.

Comedy Stage. **Rob Newman.**

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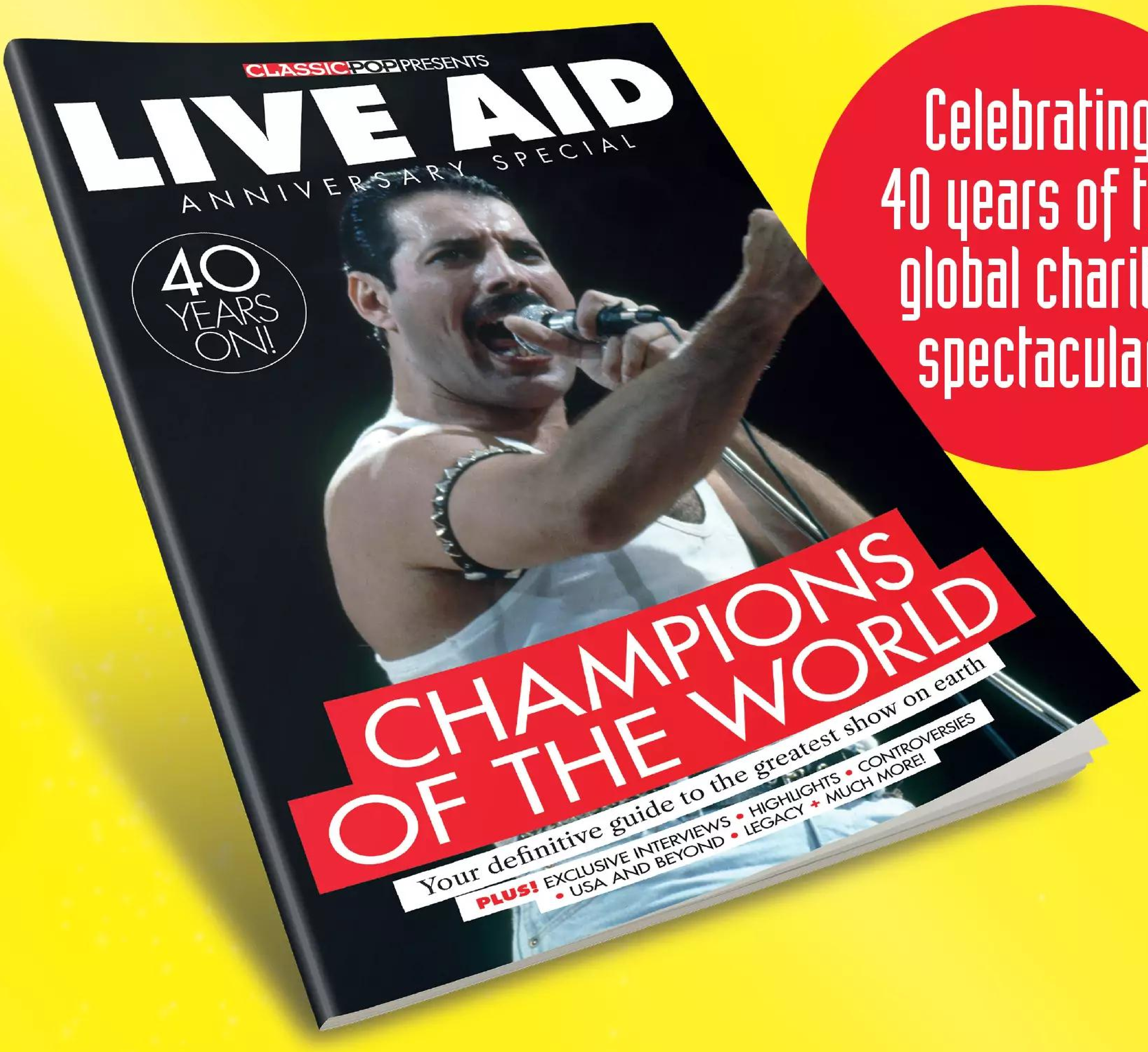
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RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ PATCHY
★ POOR

We review Alison Goldfrapp's latest solo album, *Flux*, on page 82

THE HOT LIST

NEW RELEASES THAT NEED TO BE ON YOUR CULTURAL RADAR

DAN BIGGANE

1
SIMPLE MINDS
SIMPLE MINDS LIVE
The ALBUM most WANTED
SIMPLE MINDS

© Dean Chalkley

① ONCE UPON A TIME

SIMPLE MINDS

First released in October 1985, Simple Minds' *Once Upon A Time* will be reissued for its 40th anniversary on red vinyl and as a 5CD boxset on 17 October. The limited-edition LP includes *Don't You (Forget About Me)* for the first time, while the CD set features the original album and bonus discs boasting additional material. Its content includes the original and extended versions of *The Breakfast Club* hit single, 12" mixes, B-sides, rarities and the two-disc *Live In The City Of Light* concert – alongside a 36-page booklet featuring rare photos, a track-by-track guide as well as interviews with Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill.

2
KLEEN PLATE CLUB
DREAMS NEVER END

② HOME

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

Producer Tom Sharkett of Manchester synth-pop group W. H. Lung has remixed LCD Soundsystem's *Home*. Reworking the cut from 2010's *This Is Happening* purely out of love for the track and James Murphy's band, his version caught the attention of Flo Dill, the Breakfast Show DJ on NTS Radio. This, in turn, drew the band's interest, who have now decided to make it official with a 12" release scheduled for September.

③ IN TOO DEEP

DEAD OR ALIVE

The third single lifted from Dead Or Alive's *Youthquake* is being reissued as a limited-edition 7" vinyl picture disc, as Demon Records continues its 40th anniversary celebration of the band's second studio LP. Featuring *I'd Do Anything* on the flipside, *In Too Deep* followed the No.1 smash *You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)* and *Lover Come Back To Me* (No.11) into the UK Top 20, peaking at No.14 during its original six-week run in the chart during the summer of 1985. Replicating the original single's sleeve design – with frontman Pete Burns sporting his trademark eyepatch – the reissue is released on 1 August.

④ YOUNG LOVE

BOO BOOS

Eels' Mark Everett has teamed up with Kate Mattison of the band 79.5 to form new project Boo Boos. Everett, aka Bronco Boo, and Mattison (Katie Boo), release the 12-track new album *Young Love* on 19 September via PIAS. Lead single *C'mon Baby* is described by Mattison as a "nod to the duets of the 70s." Released in tandem with

BOO BOOS
YOUNG LOVE
4

C'mon Baby, album opener *That's Not A Thing* was the duo's first foray into bicoastal songwriting, with Katie and Bronco penning the track 3,000 miles apart. For more details, visit thebooboos.com.

3
DEAD OR ALIVE
IN TOO DEEP

MADONNA
VERONICA ELECTRONICA

WARNER

★★★☆☆

MADONNA'S *RAY OF LIGHT* ALTER-EGO EMERGES AFTER 27 YEARS – SOUNDING VERY FAMILIAR TO HARDCORE FANS

That *Veronica Electronica* is finally officially released is possibly the most intriguing fact of Madonna's third remix album. Adopting the alter-ego to get into the headspace to go fully electronic on *Ray Of Light* – Veronica is her Catholic confirmation name – Madonna had planned for *Veronica Electronica* to be released at the end of its parent album's campaign.

However, *Ray Of Light* was so successful, there was no time for a companion club set before the singer returned with *Music*.

Although Madonna has stated she's working on overhauling the preceding *Bedtime Stories*, the only previous release since she announced her planned all-eras reissue campaign in 2021 was the *Finally Enough Love* singles compilation.

So, it's great that she's finally allowing catalogue material out into the world, even if *Veronica Electronica* is a fairly vanilla start: it's only on vinyl, with no CD, and in truth it'd make more sense as part of a deluxe *Ray Of Light* package, which could also accommodate heavily bootlegged unreleased tracks like *I'll Be Gone*, *Never Love A Stranger* and *Revenge*.

At least there's one unreleased song, *Gone, Gone, Gone*. Made with Rick Nowels before William Orbit came on board, it's a decent potential album track of Madonna on the attack, but the drum 'n' bass backing is more of a *Bedtime Stories* continuation than the serenity of *Ray Of Light*.

The seven remixes are all edits of reworkings familiar from the album's singles.

MADONNA
veronica electronica

The opening two mixes by Sasha especially benefit from edits. His *Twilo Remix* of the title track becomes appropriately brighter, while his joint overhaul of *Drowned World/Substitute For Love* with BT is now one extended drop before its frantic finale.

Choosing the late Peter Rauhofer's *Collaboration Remix* of *Skin* as the album's first single makes sense: *Skin* is one of the original LP's more obscure tracks, and Rauhofer's beats-heavy version always resembled a radio edit anyway. But Rauhofer's other contribution shows that not all remixes improve in their shorter form: condensing both his Club 69 alias' speed and dub mixes in one is jarring.

Regular Madonna remixer Victor Calderone's new edit of *Sky Fits Heaven* also loses some of his Latin flavour. The most obscure remixer, film composer Fabien Waltmann, at least keeps the industrial atmospherics in his *The Power Of Good-Bye*.

An intriguing project that doesn't quite stand on its own, hopefully Madonna will sign off on more extensive catalogue projects soon. **John Earls**

D:REAM
DO IT ANYWAY

CHRYSALIS

★★★½☆

Last year seemed to mark a line in the sand for D:Ream. They played with Professor Brian Cox at Glastonbury for a cheery reunion with their former touring keyboardist.

More significantly for their long-term music, the duo admitted they'd never wanted *Things Can Only Get Better* to become co-opted as a political anthem and have withdrawn its use for future events (fun though it was when it hijacked Rishi Sunak's farewell speech).

It's left Peter Cunnah and Al Mackenzie to be freer and more natural than they've sounded since D:Ream first emerged in the early 90s.

With no new music for a decade, 2021's *Open Hearts Open Minds* was a somewhat tentative return, understandably playing it safe.

While the title track and first single here is based on a 90s demo that Cunnah originally intended for Kylie, most of *Do It Anyway* is a smoother, more age-appropriate take on D:Ream's frenetic pop-house.

Nobody's Child and the route one innuendo of *Funk U Up* are the only outright bangers, the former's hyperactive keys in particular instantly recreating the youthful rush of 1993's *D:Ream On Vol 1*.

The opening *Let Our Love Shine On* typifies the pair's intent: smooth funk bass, Cunnah's voice still energetic but much lower than is familiar, with a general elegance like Groove Armada remixing Level 42.

The formula is repeated on *The Geek Who Rules The World*, with the added obvious satire there on Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and their unlovely breed.

Although it's more concerned with personal philosophy, *Anthem For Change* furthers D:Ream's distancing themselves from their New Labour sunlit uplands reputation as Cunnah sings: "Fools forget their philosophy", although the earworm refrain "Change is coming, baby" is one any political party might yet leap on if D:Ream aren't careful.

There's Something In The Water is the standout, Cunnah's rumbling vocals matched by moody strings and a militaristic syncopated rhythm for a filmic, dramatic five minutes. D:Ream finally no longer sound like a one-album wonder. **JE**

D:REAM
DO IT ANYWAY

ALISON GOLDFRAPP
FLUX

A.G.

★★★½☆

While there was a six-year gap between Goldfrapp's final album *Silver Eye* in 2017 and Alison Goldfrapp's solo debut *The Love Invention*, the singer now appears to be making up for lost time.

The club-friendly mood of that first album made perfect sense for a remix set via *The Love Reinvention*, not least because its title was so obvious.

Now Alison is back with Richard X, this time making the whole album with him and – at X's recommendation – Swedish producer Stefan Storm, of dreampop duo The Sound Of Arrows.

The more chilled mood of *Flux* isn't quite as dramatic a contrast with Goldfrapp generally switching between wigged-out futurism and eerie spook-folk on alternate albums.

There are a handful of new bangers, especially the insistent *Find Xanadu* and the demented headrush of *Reverberotic*, which would bounce perfectly among *Supernature*'s assorted manias.

Of the calmer moments, *UltraSky* is a standout for its perfect mix of downtempo grooves recalling Everything But The Girl and Alison's vocals at their dreamiest, her usual sci-fi atmosphere this time taking listeners to less imposing, more relaxed worlds. Of course, given how she influenced Dua Lipa, there's an irony that Alison sounds like she's been cribbing, as *Cinnamon Light*'s sleek polish is straight off *Radical Optimism*.

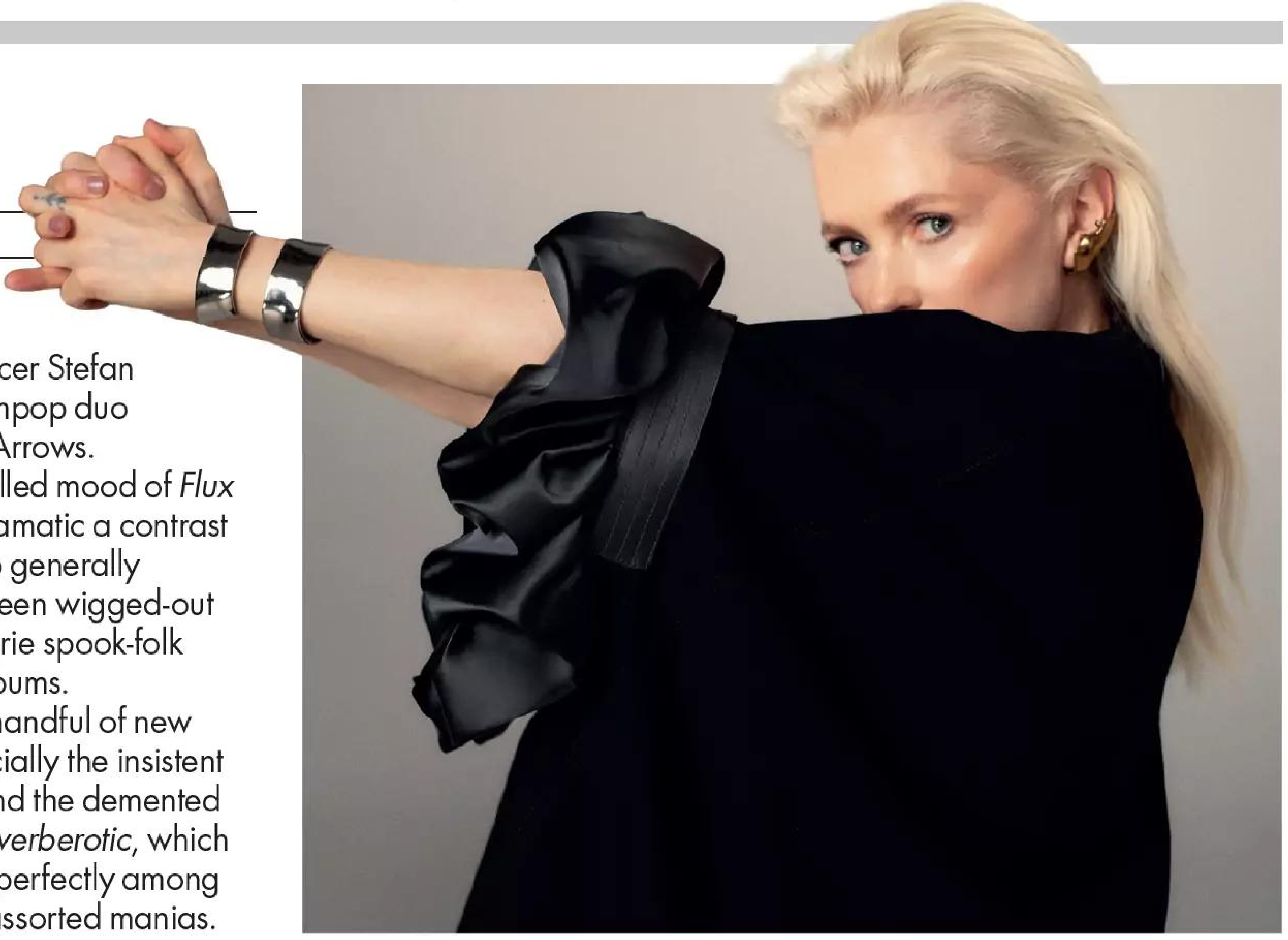
There's a fine line between imperiously gliding along without a care and pop autopilot, and occasionally Alison doesn't find a hook memorable enough to carry the slick mood.

Flux tails off somewhat, with *Ordinary Day*'s sub-William Orbit ambience sounding like a *Ray Of Light* knock-off.

Worse, the wordless chittering of *Magma* is just strangely bland. Whisper it, but it could be by Ellie Goulding as it ambles about, looking for a personality.

This is the first release on Alison's own A.G. label, and an external force might have suggested instead ending *Flux* on the hypnotic *Play It (Shine Like Nova A Star)* or the whomping pulse of *Sound & Light*.

There's a beatific glow to Alison Goldfrapp here. Mostly, it suits her. **JE**



PAUL WELLER
FIND EL DORADO

PARLOPHONE

★★★☆☆

Paul Weller has admitted that, when he released his only previous covers LP *Studio 150* in 2004, he was starting to go stale. The revival begun by *Wild Wood* and *Stanley Road* was beginning to ossify into the dadrock clichés doubters had painted him as. Weller wanted to remind himself why he got into music, which worked: from the impassioned subsequent album *As Is Now* onwards, the Modfather hasn't stopped being inspired since.

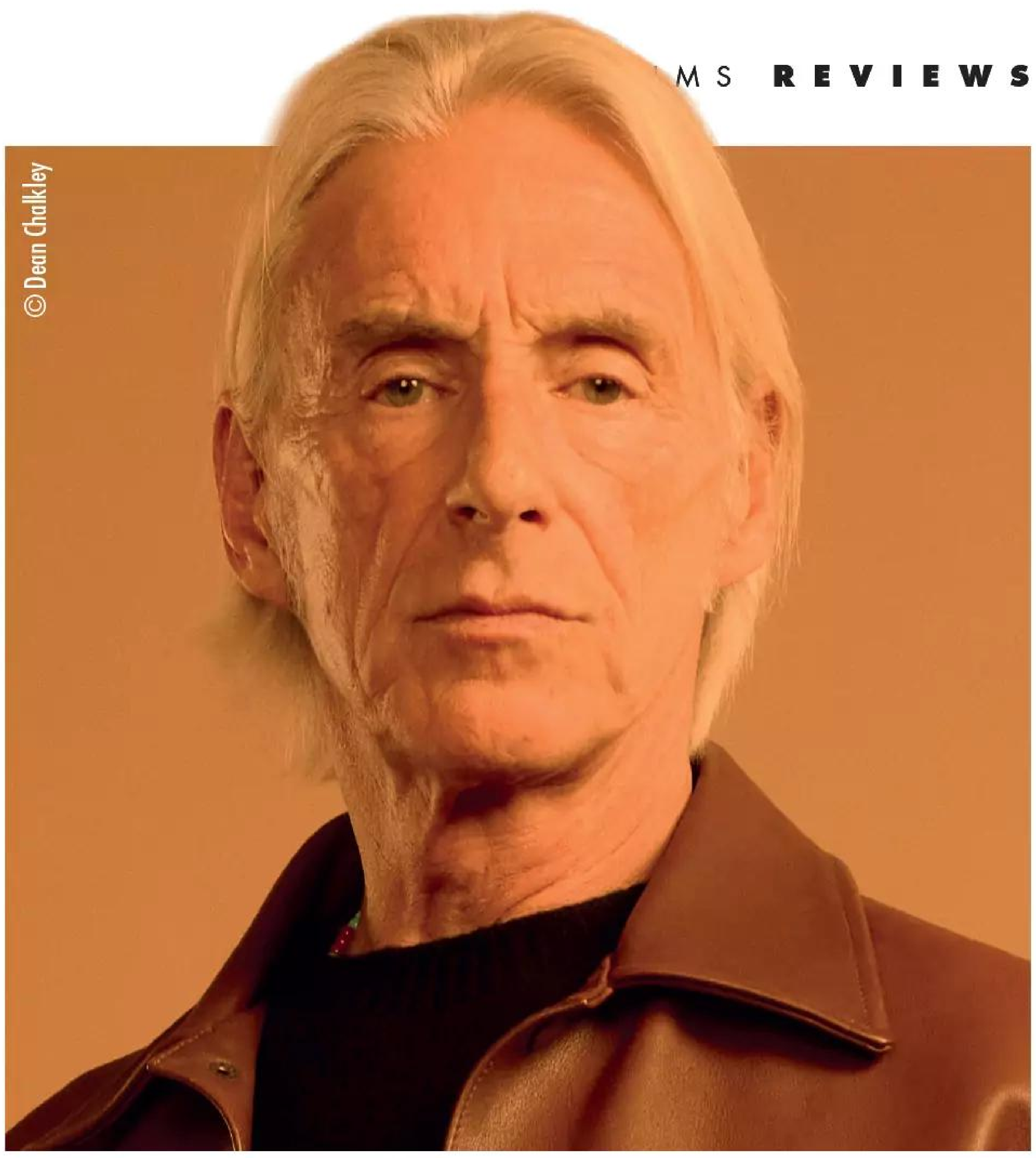
FIND EL DORADO

Aside from Sparks, who else of Weller's vintage has remained so unpredictable? Of his 10 albums since *Studio 150*, only 2018's reflective *True Meanings* has resembled the reflective elder statesman that casual listeners would expect.

If *Studio 150* came at a low ebb, here's Weller finally relaxing at the top of his game. While that predecessor featured an Oasis cover, there's no nodding to current inspirations here.

P.P. Arnold's *Daltry Street* and Richie Havens' *Handouts In The Rain*, both later gems from veteran artists, are the only 21st century songs. The former is Weller on conversationally gruff autopilot, its strings overblown and saccharine. At least the orchestration on The Kinks' *Nobody's Fool* is light and teasing.

As shown on first single *Lawdy Rolla*, the album works best when Weller brings his now standard adventurousness. The Guerrillas cover has a groove and swing also present in an uplifting take on Duncan Browne's *Journey*, which would have fitted on last year's *66*.


© Dean Chalkley

A chilled Weller is always a treat, but the laidback pace barely varies. A gentle meander through the Bee Gees' *I Started A Joke* isn't a patch on Pet Shop Boys' heartbreaking cover, while the lesser-known songs won't make you rush to check out the originals.

Feeling like a footnote rather than the radical reworkings 2025 Weller is capable of, it is interesting to peer into his record collection. Whether anyone bar the diehards needs to pay much attention is debatable. **JE**

KENNY THOMAS
UNSTOPPABLE

KARTEL

★★★★☆

Although it's 14 years since his last full album, *Breathe*, Kenny Thomas has been undergoing a revival, partly inspired by a 2022 best of. His new tour sees the biggest show of his 35-year career, at Hammersmith Apollo.

Thomas' concerts retain the youthful enthusiasm of the early days, when *Outstanding* and *Best Of You* earned him two BRITs nominations, a spirit shot through his effervescent return to the studio. *Unstoppable* is produced by Stockholm-based Opolopo. Known as a remixer for Jungle, Gregory Porter and Shaun Escoffery, Opolopo seizes his production chance, subtly updating the pop sensibilities which first got Thomas noticed while letting his voice carry the song.

The likes of *If I Can't Have You* and *Without You* are uplifting, dancefloor-ready slick grooves without sounding like Thomas is trying too hard to fit in with modern trends.

Kim Wilde pops by to add to the general euphoria on *Shout Out*, while the squelchy *What You Do For Me* adds some Fat Larry's Band smoothness.

It's not entirely carefree. Thomas' absence was partly because he and songwriter wife Francisca have been caring for their daughter, who has a rare form of brain tumour. Written by Francisca, *Walking Man* hints at their struggles, an emotional heft continuing into a new stripped-back take on Thomas' 1991 hit *Thinking About Your Love*.

© Luke Broadhurst

Stand Up For Love reunites Thomas with his original writing partner Eliot Kennedy, who has since written with Bryan Adams and Mary J Blige. Slyly funny about the power of love, Thomas still sings it like a dream. If he sounded in awe of soul music when he first emerged, decades on he's more assured and, well, soulful.

That doesn't mean Thomas has lost his sense of wonder. Piano house monster *How Does It Feel* is borne aloft by sounding like he can't believe his luck to still be doing this, singing: "I don't want to get off, it's one hell of a rush." That's a sentiment that applies to his new album, too. **JE**

WET LEG
MOISTURIZER

DOMINO

★★★★☆

Brilliant as Wet Leg's 2022 singles *Chaise Longue* and *Wet Dream* were, their self-titled debut album couldn't quite live up to it. Three Grammys and two BRITs followed in its wake, yet overall it felt too rushed to capitalise on that early promise.

By last year's festival appearances, with no sign of new music, the joke was starting to wear thin for both fans and crowd, competing to see who could look more bored. Fears that they were going to be two-hit wonders started to be dispelled when first single *Catch These Fists* finally emerged. With Dan Carey again producing, it was just as infectious as their signature tunes, but rawer and punkier, living up to its taunting "Man down!" chorus.

To generalise, that's the main mood on album two.

The early hilarious snark remains, this time with a tougher sound that also manages to keep their eccentricity.

It seems to have helped that, recording in Suffolk while bingeing on horror films at night, the whole five-piece band are more involved to help flesh out Rhian Teasdale and Hester Chambers' visions.

That's especially true on *Pillow Talk*, a more snarling attack than *Catch These Fists*, and the intense stare of *Mangetout*, whose cry of "Get lost forever!" sums up its juddering disdain for the world.

© Iris Luz

While it's a far more complete album than its predecessor, it is unlikely the mainstream would have paid so much attention to the murky, Sleater-Kinney mood of *Don't Speak* or the operatic slo-mo psychedelia of *11:21*.

Wet Leg reach out to the masses on occasion. *Pokemon* is shimmery dreampop, bolstered by Ellis Durand's bouncing bass, while the closing *U And Me At Home* – at 4 minutes 1 second the only song over four minutes – is mighty indie-disco with the emphasis on disco, Wet Leg's own *Girls & Boys*.

More typically, *Liquidize* is maverick wild-eyed punk pop like solo Graham Coxon.

Who cares what the Grammys and BRITs think this time? To quote *Mangetout*: good job, give you an eight. **JE**

BRIAN ENO & BEATIE WOLFE
LUMINAL/LATERAL

VERVE

★★★★☆/★★★★☆

Brian Eno has been busy. Apart from campaigning around the Israel-Palestine conflict, 2022's *ForeverAndEverNoMore* album was one of his finest, while he's recorded soundtracks (*Top Boy*, *Rams*) as well as collaborated on albums with his brother Roger and former protégé Fred Again.

BEATIE WOLFE & BRIAN ENO
LUMINAL

BRIAN ENO & BEATIE WOLFE
LATERAL

Now Eno's back with two albums of contrasting character, alongside award-winning conceptual artist and composer, Beatie Wolfe.

Lateral can be filed easily amid Eno's ambient work like *Apollo* and *Discreet Music*, its eight tracks beginning with the same treated piano motif, then meandering beautifully in different directions for eight minutes.

If this sounds familiar, *Luminal* is a different beast, its peace equally immersive but nonetheless more sepulchral, as illustrated by skeletal opener *Milky Sleep*, where Wolfe makes the similarly otherworldly Julee Cruise seem frantic.

Hopelessly At Ease is a starlit lullaby, and – inevitably – *Shhh* is even calmer, with Wolfe's voice a mere murmur.

But, though *A Ceiling And A Lifeboat* is one of several more disconcerting tracks, muted hints of Eno's beloved gospel on the gently uplifting *And Live Again* and suitably luminous campfire singalong *My Lovely Days* ensure *Luminal* is as easy to relish as *Lateral*.

Wyndham Wallace

DOT ALLISON
SUBCONSCIOUSOLOGY

SONIC CATHEDRAL

★★★★☆

Prolific since returning to music when 2021's *Heart-Shaped Scars* ended a 12-year gap, this is Dot Allison's fourth album following her comeback, including debuting All Seeing Dolls with Anton Newcombe of The Brian Jonestown Massacre as recently as February.

Subconsciousology, on the surface, should be a breeze for Allison, as it's nominally a remix album of 2023's *Consciousology*.

Made with experimental folk producer Lomond Campbell, these pulsating reworkings are instead as close to the dancefloor as Allison has trodden since One Dove in the 90s.

DOT ALLISON Subconsciousology
[Lomond Campbell remixes]

The original *Consciousology* was bewitching dark folk. Here, *Moon Flowers* is clanking dub built on Allison's instantly identifiable sigh, while the following *220Hz* quickly turns into drum 'n' bass with added squelch and Allison's wordless vocals chasing around the speakers trying to keep up.

Allison and Campbell are smart in recognising that her voice is distinctive enough to be the centrepiece, charismatic and versatile in carrying both the relatively straight-up pop of *Milk And Honey* evoking Kosheen and Olive, and the haunting *Unchanged*'s spectral slo-mo atmospherics.

All the moods are carried off classily, but *Weeping Roses* is the most thrilling moment, as Allison and Campbell create a giddy acid house masterpiece from the original's twinkling folk. **JE**

© Helen Scott

M/ROBIN SCOTT
THE FAQs OF LIFE

BMG

★★★½☆

THE *POP MUZIK* MASTERMIND RECLAIMS HIS OLD IDENTITY TO EXERCISE HIS PLAYFUL, PROVOCATIVE CHARMS

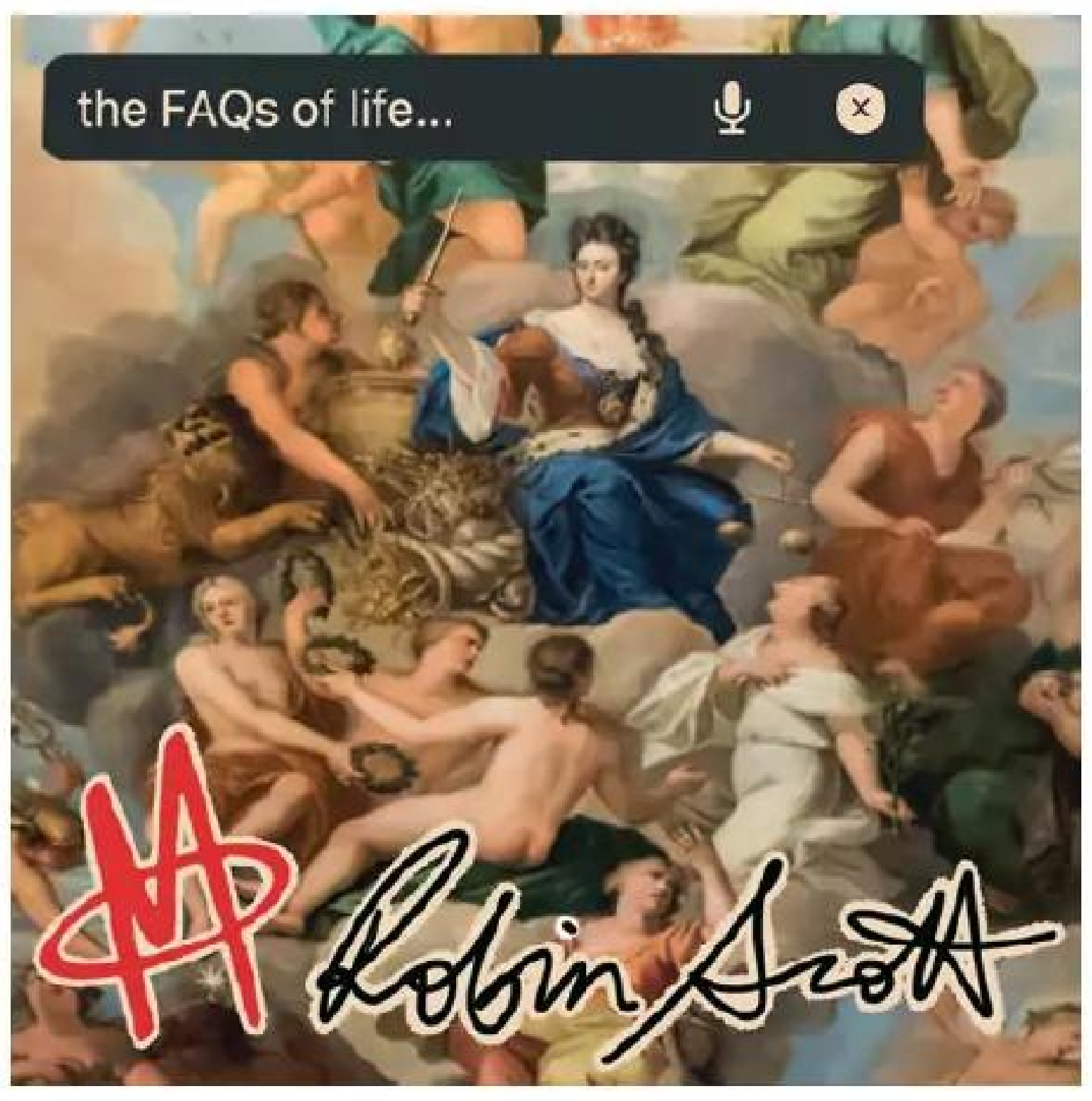
When Robin Scott last offered an album as M, its title, *Famous Last Words*, looked prophetic. That was in 1982, though Scott's not been entirely MIA since. He was working with world music by the mid-80s, and has recorded solo under his own name, most recently 2017's *Emotional DNA*. His masterpiece, 1979's cleverly infectious *Pop Muzik*, was also embraced for U2's late 90s *PopMart* tour, then revived multiple times for a 2010 remix collection, while TikTok has helped restore its ubiquity.

The FAQs Of Life, however, breathes new life into the M brand, a commercially convenient choice nonetheless suiting its character. M was always mischievous, quick-witted and self-aware, and if it's not as cutting edge as Scott once was – and at 14 songs, overburdened – that's not his concern. As he sings to *Slow Dance*'s MOR synths and softly chugging guitars: "It may sound cliché/ But I'll say it anyway..."

It's true, *The FAQs Of Life* at times spins clichés, especially in its latter, more personal tunes. *Save Me* starts like a beach soundtrack, then adds pounding drums, distorted guitars and, later, a fiery solo, as well as self-flagellation to its lilting rhythms.

The sometimes hushed, sometimes lush *The Grass Is Greener* is heartfelt, but its guitar flourishes feel overly polite, while the Broadway twinkle of *My Idea Of Heaven*'s fantasy lands it can't hide its contrasting bombast.

Elsewhere, though, Scott hits the target, his lyrics crafted and pertinent, his delivery arch – at times close to Brett Anderson's most Bowie-like caricatures – and his songs a polished collision of 10cc, Sparks and The Buggles.



Opener *Afterlife* provides immediate proof that Scott has lost little of the pep that made M so entertaining and, though it's debatable whether he needs to rap over *Shifting Sands*' Gorillaz-friendly breakbeat in a style simultaneously social media Grandpa and theatrically Robbie Williams, he gets away with it.

Break The Silence also morphs into a stomper, and *Enough Is Enough* cranks up bluesy guitars, then smooths the edges with glittering synths. *AI?* slows down the pace, inviting aliens to visit, while *Crossfire* wades into the Middle East crisis in balladeer style, its elegant regret occasionally echoing Chris Isaak's *Wicked Game*.

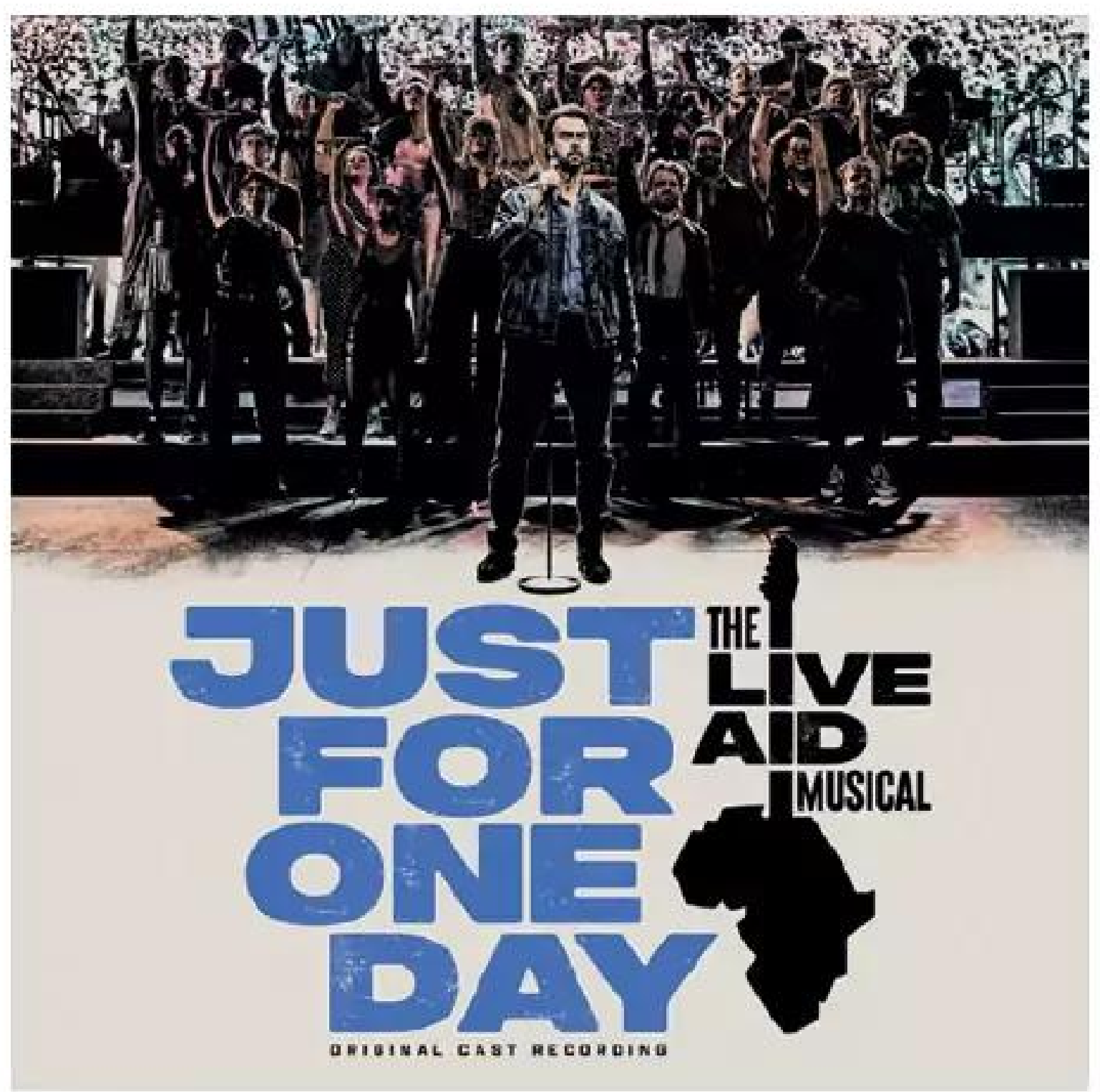
But there's no better illustration of Scott's strengths than *2B Or Not 2B*, *The FAQs Of Life*'s jolly conclusion, which couldn't be less morbid if it tried. Should these turn out to be M's famous last words, they're not only written by Shakespeare but Scott has also made them his own. Talk about pop music! **WW**

ORIGINAL CAST RECORDING
JUST FOR ONE DAY: THE LIVE AID MUSICAL

SMALL CHANGE

★★★☆☆

Ever wanted to hear Margaret Thatcher belting out Elton John's *I'm Still Standing*? Or Harvey Goldsmith tackling The Who's *Pinball Wizard*? Well, thanks to the wonders of a *Classic Pop*-friendly stage musical, now's your chance. Kinda. Indeed, alongside Bob Geldof and Midge Ure, the Iron Lady and the almost-as-fearsome concert promoter are the real-life figures portrayed in the Live Aid-themed *Just For One Day*.



Stripped from their context of "The day when music brought the world together," this official recording often resembles a fever dream. And it's fair to say that certain numbers don't travel from Wembley Stadium to the West End particularly well – does anyone need a dadrock version of *Do They Know It's Christmas*?

However, the tracks already rooted in the theatrical – *Vienna* and all four Queen songs – fare better, while a slow-building *Message In A Bottle* brings the first act to a rousing close.

Furthermore, an experienced cast which includes Danielle Steers (*Bat Out Of Hell*), Jack Shalloo (*Our House*) and Ashley Campbell (*Sunny Afternoon*) help sell the drama, which flits between the build-up of the mid-80s to the white saviour-questioning present day. But only theatre nerds are likely to choose this over the real things. **Jon O'Brien**

AFRICA EXPRESS
BAHIDORA

WORLD CIRCUIT

★★★★☆

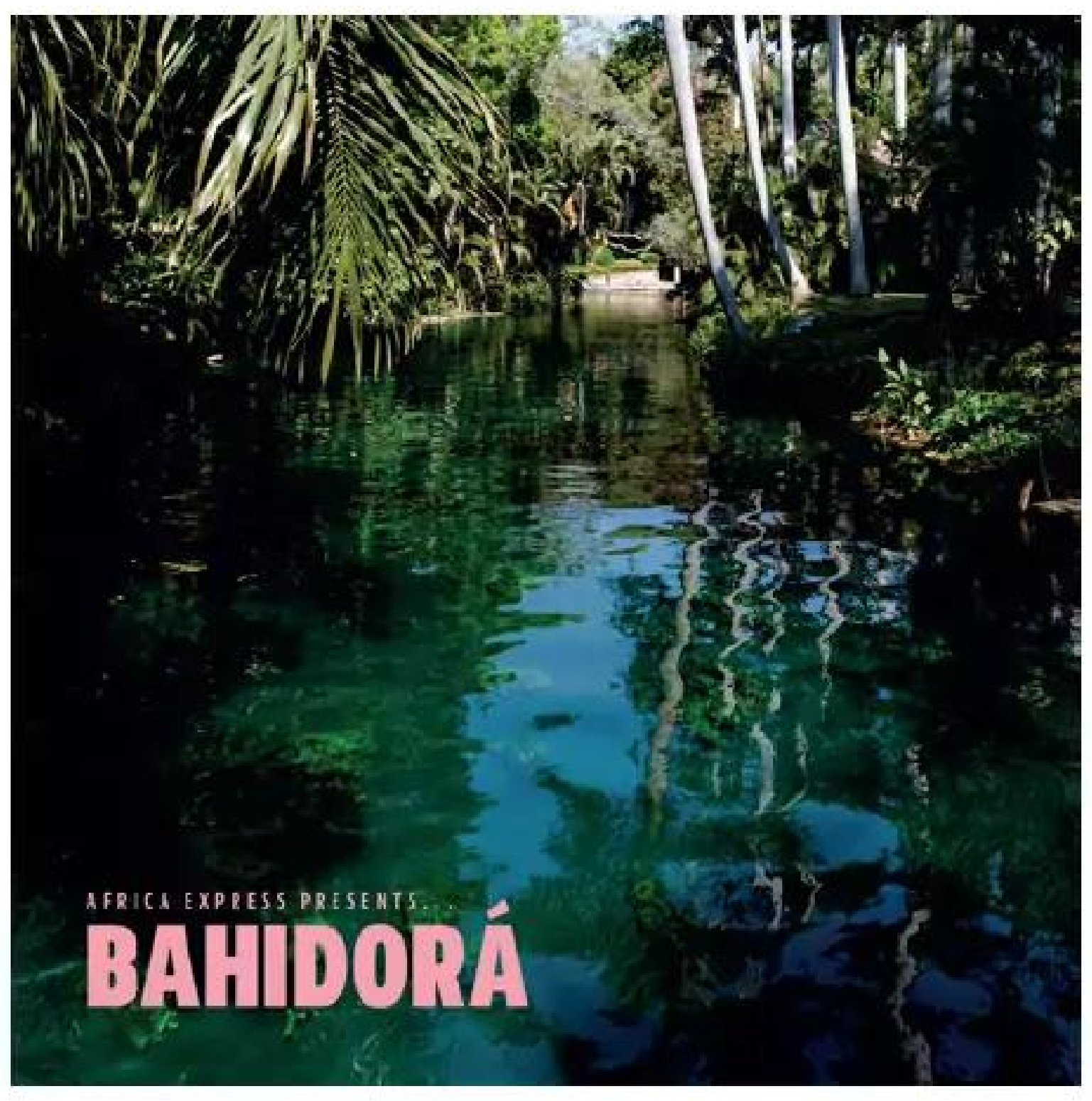
In February 2024, Africa Express headed to the Americas for the first time. More specifically, the collective, co-founded by Damon Albarn, headlined Mexican festival Bahidorá. Following a five-hour show, those involved stuck around to make field recordings in different combinations.

Be glad they made the effort. Following standout opener *Soledad*, a mournful duet concerning "soledad sin fin" ("endless loneliness") performed in Spanish by Albarn and Mexican singer-songwriter Luisa Almaguer, there's barely a weak track among the 21 collected here. Even the less memorable collaborations are never less than interesting.

Unsurprisingly, the vibe leans towards Latin, but that still allows all concerned to cover a lot of ground. *Mi Lado*, for instance, is a slick pop track built upon a reggaeton beat and featuring vocals from Mexican rapper Mare Advertencia. It's in complete sonic contrast to the frenetic cumbia of *Chucha*, which finds Joan As Police Woman screaming about UFOs.

At other times, African beats are interweaved into tracks, so that the closing *Adios Amigos* is infused with the spirit of North African desert blues. As for the joyous ska take on The Smiths' *Panic*, it's deliriously bonkers.

A joyous cross-cultural collaboration. **Jonathan Wright**



YUNGBLUD
IDOLS

LOCOMOTION

★★★★☆

Launched with the second of his own Bludfest festivals to 40,000 fans at Milton Keynes Bowl in June, Yungblud's fourth album cements Doncaster's Dominic Harrison as a genre-mashing popstar.

He's got the outsize personality of Robbie Williams, the cartoon punk image of Billy Idol, vocals generally indebted to Freddie Mercury and the guitar frills of Guns N' Roses to add rock substance when needed.

While Yungblud's second No.1 album, 2022's self-titled predecessor, overdid the petulance and relied perhaps a little too heavily on the star's comic snarl, *Idols* is a more varied affair which suggests he might genuinely go the distance, as he can either carry on being eclectic or focus on one of several diverse talents.

The album's Billy Idol side is gleefully dispensed with on the bratty *Lovesick Lullaby*, a superb piece of vaudeville in isolation, made all the more thrilling as it's surrounded by the more heartfelt, sombre, but tuneful, *Zombie* and yearning title track.

The Greatest Parade is the album's other all-out simple thrill, a route-one noisy racket recalling early Placebo. *Monday Murder* hints at Psychedelic Furs, but the six-minute *Ghosts* is the standout, a prime Britpop-inflected singalong ballad which could close his shows forever.

Yungblud always had the charm, now he's got the album to match. **JE**

CYPRESS HILL & THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
BLACK SUNDAY LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

MERCURY STUDIOS

★★★★☆

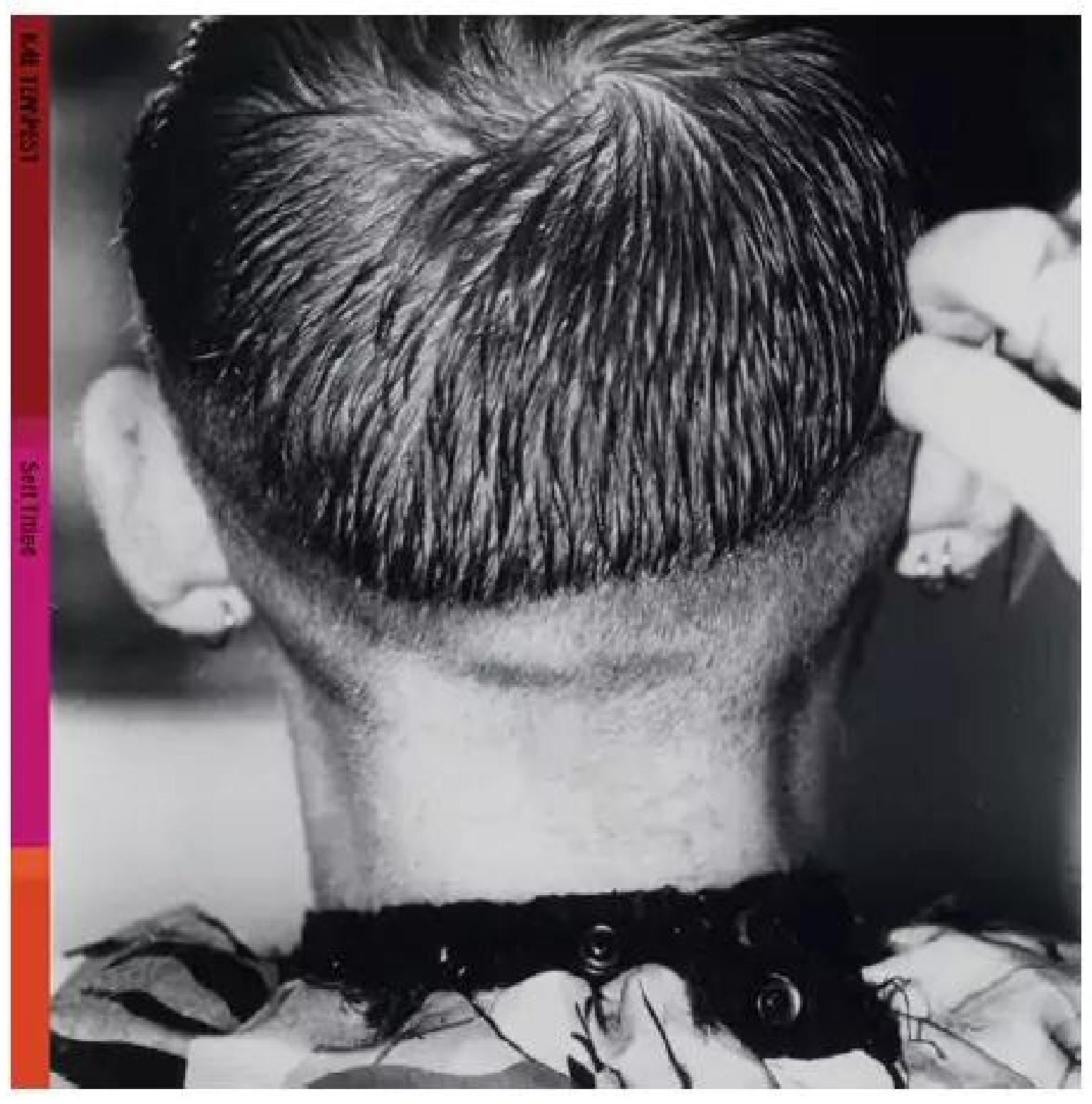
Forget Donald Trump becoming President. The most impressive of *The Simpsons*' many accurate predictions came from the 1996 Homerpalooza episode, in which rap icons Cypress Hill accidentally book the London Symphony Orchestra. Step forward 28 years and the fictional meeting of musical minds became a reality.

Capturing last year's live collaboration on the London stage in all its symphonic hip-hop glory, this souvenir album proves the concept wasn't so far-fetched after all.

Indeed, tearing through the entirety of their 1993 US No.1 album *Black Sunday*, the Californians' nasal lyrical flow meshes surprisingly well with the brass stabs and sweeping strings of the 70-piece orchestra, transforming the likes of stoner anthem *Insane In The Brain* and anti-cop tirade *When The Shit Goes Down* into cinematic affairs worthy of gracing a James Bond credits sequence.

The fervent crowd, no doubt unused to seeing the West Coast rappers suited and booted, sound just as excited to hear material from before and beyond given the philharmonic treatment, including a spirited take on debut single *How I Could Just Kill A Man*. **JO**

Cypress Hill
&
THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Black Sunday
LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

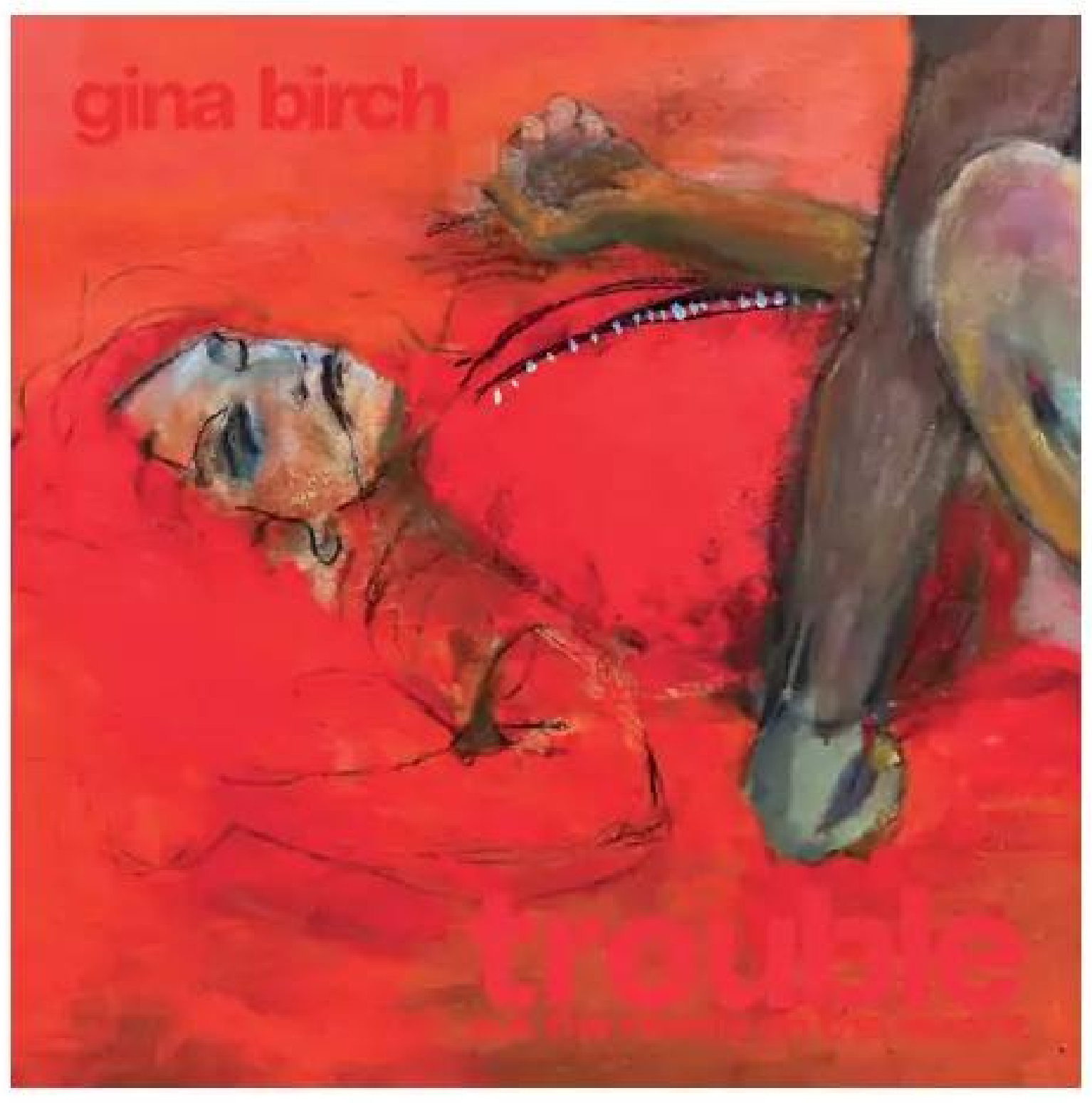


KAE TEMPEST
SELF TITLED

EMI

★★★★½

You will have doubtless heard of Kae Tempest: poet, writer, rapper. Being a *CP* reader, you may well think Tempest's oeuvre isn't really your bag. Think again. The opening salvo, including the singles *Statue In The Square* and *Know Yourself*, which deal with Tempest's trans identity, are raw and visceral, but also accessible. But there's a range of tones on display here, from the sardonic *Diagnoses* to the sweet Neil Tennant-assisted *Sunshine On Catford*. Punchy and bold, *Self Titled* is both Tempest's most pop album, and their best. **Beth Simpson**



GINA BIRCH
TROUBLE

THIRD MAN

★★★★☆

As a founder of feminist post punk outfit The Raincoats, Gina Birch's place in UK cultural history is secure. That she is making forward-thinking, utterly singular music at nearly 70 is a bonus. *Trouble* treads a fine line between the experimental and accessible, with tracks that examine mortality (*I Thought I'd Live Forever*) and the state of the world (*Doom Monger*). Best of all is *Causing Trouble Again*, which namechecks iconic female artists and activists over an electro punk backdrop. It's joyful, life-affirming and really rather wonderful – just like the album. **BS**

BUSH
I BEAT LONELINESS

BUSH
I BEAT LONELINESS

EARMUSIC

★★★½☆

During their grungy 90s heyday, Bush weren't the likeliest candidates for career longevity. But, on their 10th album, Gavin Rossdale's band sound more invigorated than ever. Credit must go to the modern-but-not-generic co-production from Erik Ron (Bad Omens) and Rossdale's knack for massive choruses and aggro hard rock with sensitivity. *We're All The Same On The Inside* boasts a bruising low end; *Rebel With A Cause* is an aching power ballad; and the electronic rock of *Scars* calls to mind 1999's *The Science Of Things*. **Annie Zaleski**

IS THIS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR?

AMY MACDONALD
IS THIS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR?

INFECTIOUS

★★★½☆

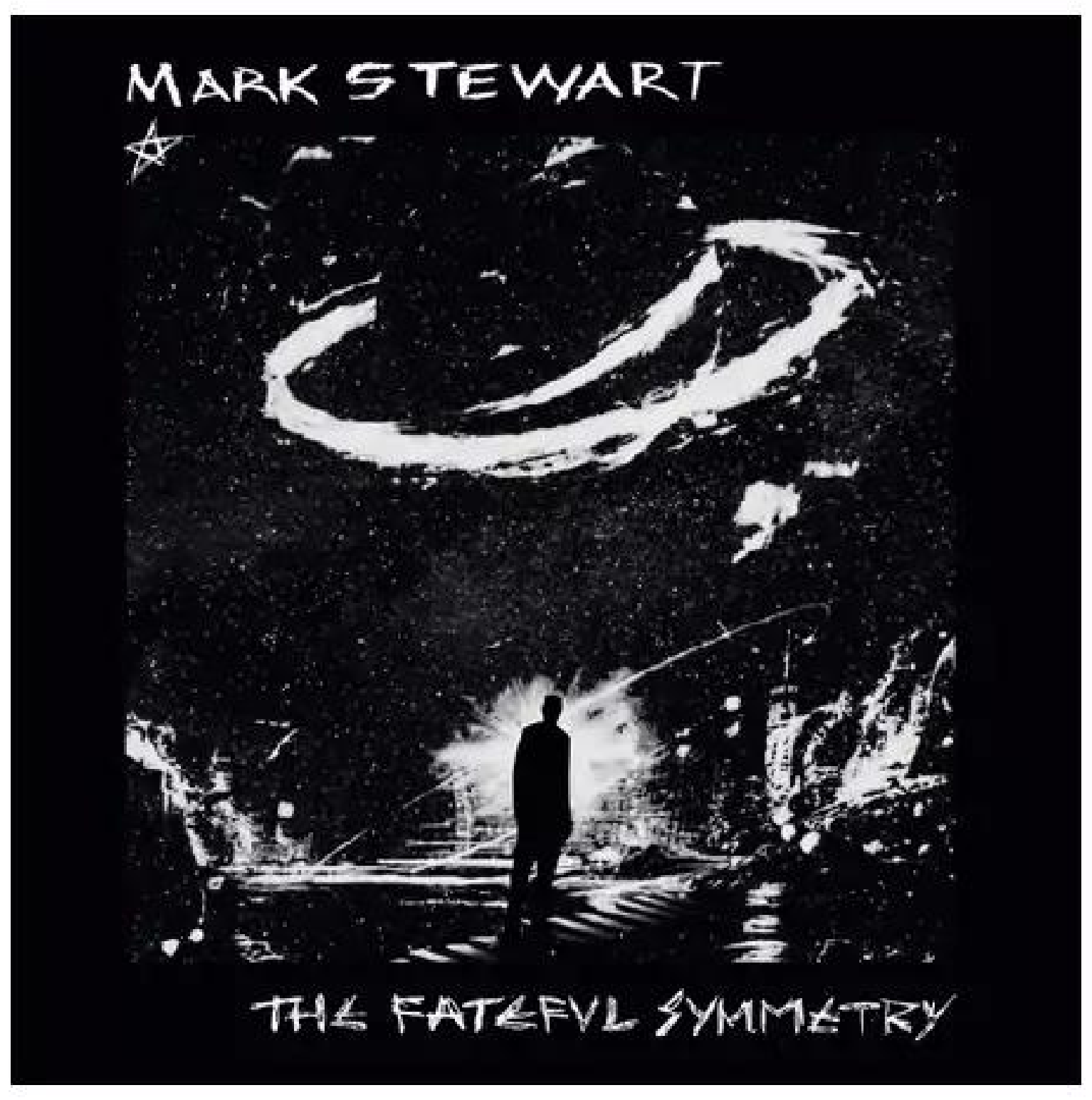
Titled after a five-year break from music, optimism pulses through Amy Macdonald's return. It's a panoramic collection about pushing past heartache, embracing boldness and looking for the silver lining. "I keep moving away from all the dark in my life," she announces on the Springsteen-calibre anthem *Forward*, while on standout *Can You Hear Me?* she tells people to embrace who they are with gusto. The music possesses appropriate gravitas, with nods to country, folk, 80s pop rock and more. **AZ**

THE ROYSTON CLUB
SONGS FOR THE SPINE

MODERN SKY

★★★★☆

Hailing from Wrexham, a fervent live audience helped propel 2023's *Shaking Hips And Crashing Cars* into the Top 20. That debut's inherent catchiness has been bolstered by Tom Faithfull's increasingly emotive vocals and Ben Mathias' more distinctive guitar. *Crowbar* and *30/20* maintain their moshpit status, but now *Curses & Spit* has a beauty to match the bite, while *Spinning*'s balladry is perfectly poised dramatics made for festival campsites. The album's 10 songs are all potential singles: the Roystons really have learned how to send shivers down the spine. **JE**

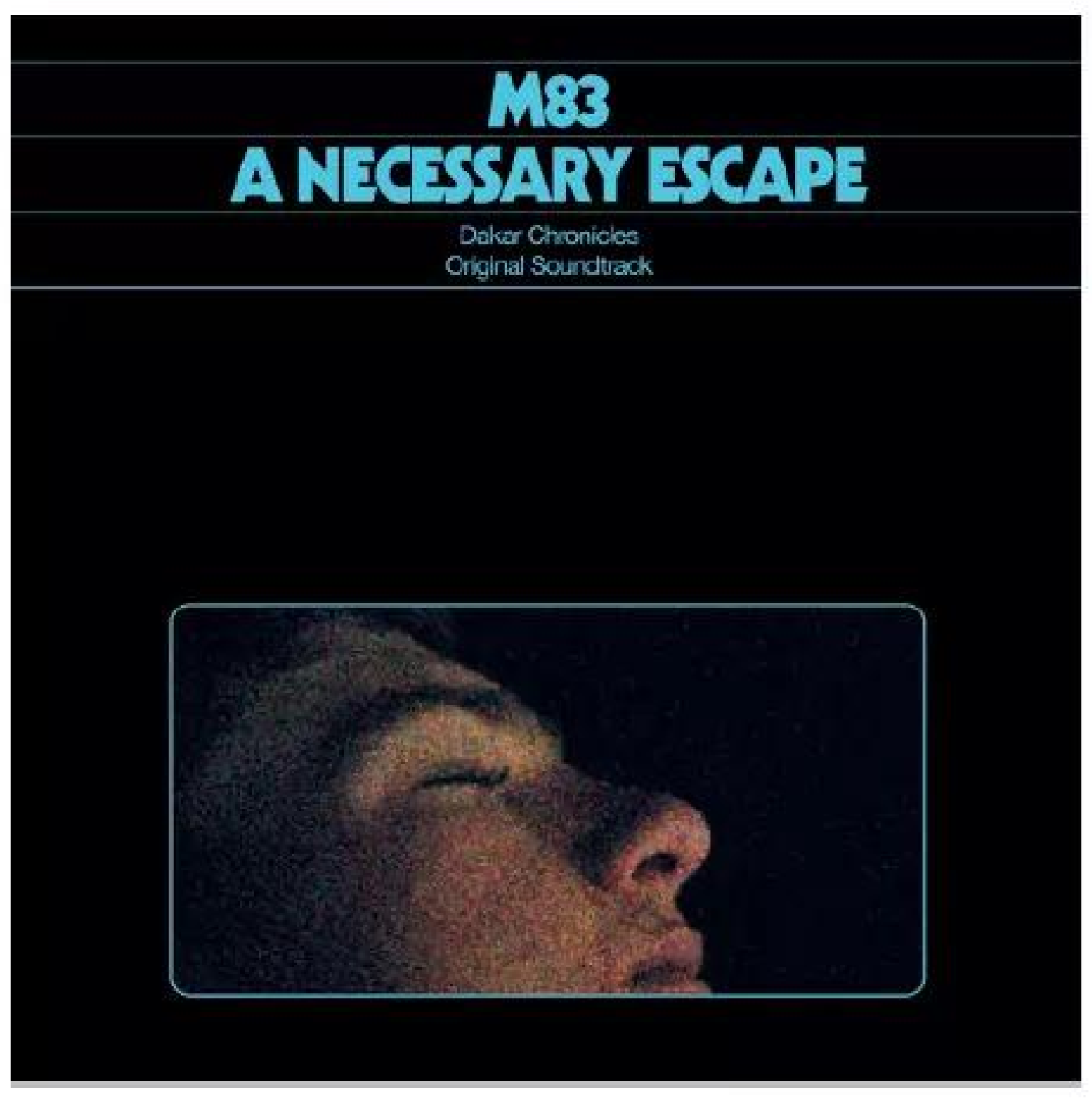


MARK STEWART
THE FATEFUL SYMMETRY

MUTE

★★★★☆

An anti-authoritarian autodidact who believed punk's DIY ethic gifted him "the power of arrogance", The Pop Group frontman Mark Stewart was an inspirational figure. He was also someone who, until his death in 2023, continued to make radical music, as evidenced by this fine posthumous album featuring contributions from, among others, Youth, Hollie Cook and Gina Birch. A dub-infused reworking of The Korgis' *Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime* is a highlight, as is *This Is The Rain*, a ballad that insists on finding hope amidst life's struggles. **JW**



M83
A NECESSARY ESCAPE

OTHER SUNS

★★★½☆

Those longing for the skyscraping bravado and ambient stargazing of M83's early days – rather than Anthony Gonzalez's poppier inclinations – will welcome this soundtrack to Red Bull's *Dakar Chronicles* film. The 9,000km rally's immensity is repeatedly evoked, not least in opener *A Necessary Escape (Part 1)*'s epic climax and *Echoes*' panoramas. Its liberating speed is evident, too, in *Strike Machine*'s pulsing rhythms and *Artificial Infinity*'s krautrock flavours. Chance to catch one's breath comes later in the title track's second and third incarnations. **WW**

GWENNO
UTOPIA

HEAVENLY

★★★★☆

Following committed attempts to revive both the Welsh and Cornish languages, former Pipettes vocalist Gwenno now releases her first predominantly English solo affair. Luckily, *Utopia* proves that pop's most niche multi-linguist has lost none of her allure. While *Dancing On Volcanoes* is a joyfully jangly ode to a wild night out, *London 1757* and closer *Hireth* deliver the kind of otherworldly dreampop that earned predecessor *Tresor* a Mercury Prize nod. The lushly orchestrated *73* and *St Ives New School* help ensure the album lives up to its title. **JO**

SCISSOR SISTERS
SCISSOR SISTERS

AUGUST 2025
CLASSIC POP
BEST REISSUE

REPUBLIC

★★★★★

FOLLOWING THEIR RECENT TOUR, THE REASON BRITAIN FELL UNDER THE SCISSORS' FILTHY GORGEOUS SPELL GETS A BRILLIANT UPDATE. TIME TO TAKE YOUR MAMA OUT AGAIN...

Underrated as Jake Shears' two recent solo albums have been, Scissor Sisters' debut LP coming of age deserved to be celebrated in style.

Disappointing though it was that Ana Matronic wasn't along for the ride, May's reunion tour served as fresh notice that Scissor Sisters were the most extravagant pop collective of the Noughties.

Their debut was revisited with a vinyl reissue in 2019, but this 3CD set (with some of its extras on an accompanying new 2LP) is the full hoopla *Scissor Sisters* deserves.

The original album remains magnificent. Frothy as hits like *Take Your Mama* and *Laura* sounded, there was a core of steel under it all. Those basslines have *menace*, a prowling leer redolent of the New York underground from where Shears and Babydaddy emerged.

This is mighty pop music, but also it's wise not to mess with the thwacking truncheon beat on *Filthy/Gorgeous*, while Shears' alien mystique on *Lovers In The Backseat* is perfectly otherworldly for the esoteric action he's describing.

Of course, there is pure abandon at times: *Music Is The Victim*'s glam is a BDSM Wombles, while *Tits On The Radio* is a brilliantly catchy whirlwind, knowing its own splendour while also aware the title negates it from being the hit it could have been.

Then, of course, there's the *Comfortably Numb* cover, if anything even more irreverent given how Pink Floyd's myth has grown in the subsequent 21 years.

The extras are superb. At the time, B-sides like the squelchy *The Skins* and *Electrobix* showed Scissor Sisters had class to spare, but the seven unreleased songs are bafflingly great.

Really, how dare they have left the aptly named *Magnifique* in the vaults for so long? Why did they pull off Roxy Music so adroitly in *Night Of The Comet* and leave it to muster?

The remixes on CD3 have a lot going on, too. True, Riton and Junkie XL's reworkings have aged badly. But Fatboy Slim is in vintage party mood on *Comfortably Numb*, while *Take Your Mama* benefits from the exuberance Hot Chip were firing about the place in their early days.

There's also the legendary *See You Next Tuesday* mix of *Filthy/Gorgeous* by Ana Matronic's side-project I Love You with her now-husband Seth Kirby: proof that swearing is big, clever *and* eminently danceable.

Scissor Sisters were a much-needed jolt of full colour among the earnest Strokes wannabes of 2004. If pop has become more dominant since, who else is bringing this much sass into the mainstream now?

It's one of the decade's stone-cold classics. Now, how about giving *Night Work* and *Magic Hour* a similarly comprehensive overhaul?

John Earls

THE SISTERS OF MERCY
FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS

RHINO

★★★★½

Five years into their career, The Sisters Of Mercy's debut was effectively their second album: the compilation *Some Girls Wander By Mistake* documents their important formative years nicely.

Given Andrew Eldritch's distrust of record labels, *FALAA* is hard to find second hand, so this 40th anniversary repress is welcome, especially as it also includes the era's three 12" EPs, including non-album single *Body And Soul*.

THE SISTERS OF MERCY
FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS

It also marks 35 years since The Sisters Of Mercy last released a new studio LP.

Cussed old sod as he is, Eldritch can be bloody magnificent in the studio, especially when paired with such an adept facilitator as The Cure producer David M. Allen.

Allen brings out all the light and shade of the Sisters, meeting a band who sounded like they were relishing the chance to finally get stuck into an album, with one of Eldritch's finest team of collaborators to sound fully aligned to his dark witchcraft.

Come for the heroically histrionic boom of *Marian* and *Black Planet*, stay for Craig Adams' galloping bass bringing disco to *Logic*'s sweaty delirium and the band getting ahead of the curve by foreshadowing both Big Music on *Possession* and The Wonder Stuff's folk-rock on the title track.

It's no wonder Eldritch is so dismissive of his goth tag, when every Sisters era has its own internecine fan rivalries: many decry this line-up for not being doomy enough. That's nonsense when you hear the forbidding drama of *Nine While Nine*, even if it's got New Order's lightness of touch to it.

The EPs' B-sides continue the melodrama, *Walk Away* continuing the Big Music epic ambition and *Bury Me Deep* Eldritch at his most florid.

It didn't last, of course. Adams and Wayne Hussey became The Mission, Eldritch regathered with *Floodland*. By now, nobody is likely to give Eldritch a record deal on his terms, but you'd hope someone points him in the direction of Kickstarter. This isn't where it all began, but by 1985 The Sisters Of Mercy had honed themselves into a mighty rock band. It's great to have proof of that available again. **JE**

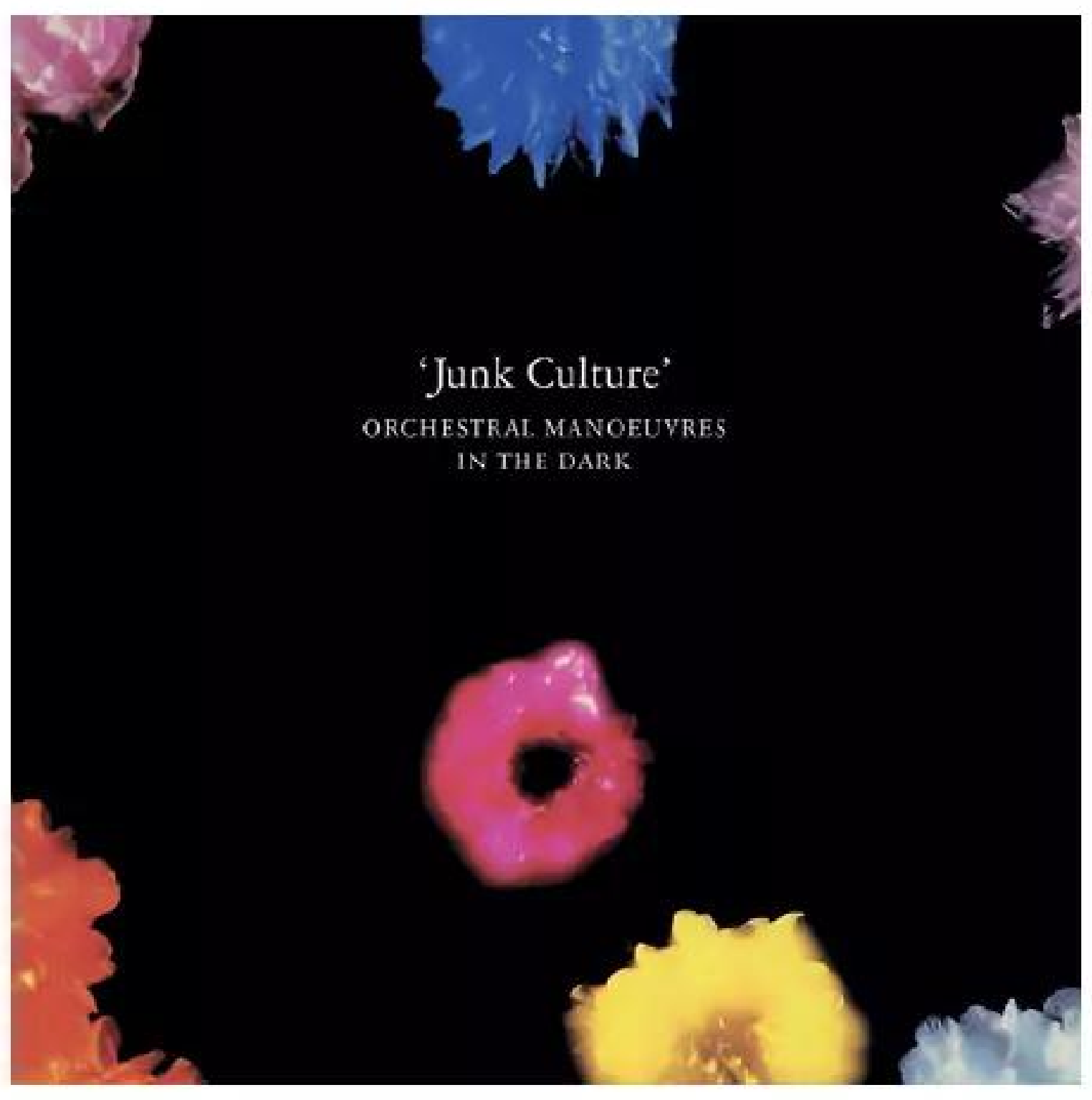
OMD
JUNK CULTURE

VIRGIN

★★★★☆

Considering 1984's fifth album was OMD's return to the charts after *Dazzle Ships* had confused the heck out of everyone, it is bizarre this new pressing is the first time *Junk Culture* has been made available on vinyl since a 1988 budget reissue.

In fairness, it received an expanded 2CD in 2015, but it deserves more respect beyond OMD's hardcore fanbase. Famously going as pop as possible after its predecessor's glorious experiments, the joyous earworms *Locomotion* and *Tesla Girls*, plus a knowing album title where the duo highlighted their shiny mainstream intentions, tends to overlook how *Junk Culture* is far from a straight-up precursor of Andy McCluskey's role as Atomic Kitten's overlord.



For a start, there's the opening instrumental title track: four minutes of melodica, dub bass and an atmospheric echoey keyboard riff. It doesn't exactly scream that McCluskey and Paul Humphreys were up for answering the phones on *Saturday Superstore*. That's the first hint OMD had been exploring the local scene near their new studio in Montserrat, made more explicit in the roots rock of *White Trash*.

All Wrapped Up is the most successful pop moment of the Caribbean influence, an uptempo summery blast of horns and steel pans, with *Love And Violence*'s sirens ushering in the album's other great non-single: an urgent, tense thriller with McCluskey's vocals at their lowest and most claustrophobic.

The ballads are admittedly less successful. *Never Turn Away* badly wants to be Joy Division and all six minutes of *Hard Day* just sound like its title. It makes the beautiful finale *Talking Loud And Clear* all the more remarkable. Just missing the Top 10, its Roxy Music levels of poise and melody should be as celebrated as *Enola Gay* and *Joan Of Arc* among OMD's biggest songs.

OMD may slightly hold *Junk Culture* at arm's length for halting their experimentation but, when it gets it right, it really is Stockhausen meets ABBA. **JE**

DURAN DURAN
GREATEST

PARLOPHONE

★★★½☆

duran duran
GREATEST
duran duran
duran duran

Given that this 1998 compilation houses some of the finest pop singles by anyone, its reissue should be cause for unbridled hosannas. Instead, the reason for *Greatest* reemerging with the minimum of fanfare is frustratingly puzzling.

If Duran want to get a key part of their catalogue back on vinyl, then the decade-long entreaties by the fanbase to have *The Wedding Album* and *Thank You* repressed (preferably as 2LPs) should have happened long before. While Duran's changes in record labels might make it hard to round everything up, you'd hope that a new singles compilation could have superseded *Greatest*, in order to include their 21st century big pop moments.

It's likely the band simply wanted a hits compilation out there on vinyl. In that regard, having *Greatest* available makes sense, even if it's a slightly shrugging release not to add *Sunrise*, *Pressure Off*, *Anniversary* and co.

Effectively released instead of new album *Medazzaland* in most countries, *Greatest* returned Duran to the Top 5: even at their commercial low ebb in 1998, everyone could remember how mighty these singles were, while fans could celebrate *New Moon On Monday* being back on a hits compilation after its omission on 1989's *Decade*.

But, to make it all fit, there were some brutal edits to around half the album's songs that were, well, notorious. That hasn't been fixed for its first vinyl release here. If the circumstances around *Greatest* feels a little ho-hum, rather than a big statement of intent for such a great singles band, hopefully someone in Duran's camp is figuring out a definitive hits set.

And hopefully, they'll make it all run chronologically.

Here, starting with *Is There Something I Should Know?* and ending on *Come Undone* is rum, as is following *Planet Earth* with *Union Of The Snake*. You can't force the eclecticism of Duran into a coherent pattern, so just let time dictate it all.

And, once again: GET *THE WEDDING ALBUM* AND *THANK YOU* ON VINYL. **JE**

TALKING HEADS
MORE SONGS ABOUT BUILDINGS AND FOOD

RHINO

★★★★☆

Effectively the record which sealed Talking Heads as critics' favourites forevermore, 1978's *More Songs About Buildings And Food* was also their first to be produced by Brian Eno. Those two facts are somewhat connected, given how Eno helped cement Ver Heads' identifiable punk and rhythm collage.

At this remove, it's still strange there was only one single, and that it was a cover of Al Green's *Take Me To The River* at a time when seemingly everyone was tackling it. Their slow, sinuous groove was so triumphant that even Green's superb original now sounds like a Talking Heads cover.

Take Me To The River gave Talking Heads their first US Top 30 hit – Britain waited until *Once In A Lifetime* to take notice commercially – and Warner weren't short of possible follow-ups.

Warning Sign demonstrated the power that Eno brought out of Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz in placing the rhythm section front and centre, *Found A Job* showed Jerry Harrison was just as funky, given the chance, while David Byrne was inevitably mesmeric throughout. Even though he's specialised in uptight characters for 50 years, Byrne relaxed on *The Good Thing*'s loose groove. But *The Girls Want To Be With The Girls* is the frontman's frantic, bewildered personality at its height. It's rightly considered a classic now, all four Heads locked in tight, but still: why wasn't it a single in 1978?

As with last year's *77* reissue, the new 3CD/4LP edition is thorough. The alternative versions are fascinating rather than essential, though Harrison's ruler-twanging playing on *Found A Job* is superb.

Following the CBGBs gig added to *77*, an unreleased live album, this time from New York's Entermedia Theater, is the essential bonus. It's almost upsetting for anyone too young to have seen Talking Heads live to be shown again how great they were in concert. Whereas CBGBs was all desperate hunger, here are Talking Heads starting to realise how good they are.

Now bring on the *Fear Of Music* deluxe. **JE**

TALKING HEADS
TALKING HEADS
TALKING HEADS

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
TRACKS II: THE LOST ALBUMS

LEGACY

★★★★☆

As America's foremost purveyor of authentic heartland rock, Bruce Springsteen's public image could hardly be clearer. Here he comes again, a blue-collar man ever primed to proselytise rock'n'roll's redemptive power. There's nothing complicated about The Boss.

Except that's the stadium Springsteen. Look back over a recording career lasting more than 50 years and, usually within certain Americana-tinged parameters, there have often been shifts in approach.

Thrill Hill Recording
1983-2018
Thrill Hill NJ + CA
The Lost Albums
LA Garage Sessions '83
Streets of Philadelphia Sessions
Faithless
Somewhere North of Nashville
Inyo
Twilight Hours
Perfect World
Stays in
TRACKS II

This restlessness is captured on an 83-track boxset covering 1983-2018. Unusually, it's not a ragbag of outtakes and live tracks, but acts as a document of seven albums never released, projects that fill gaps in Springsteen's discography.

LA Garage Sessions '83 kicks things off, a bare-bones collection falling between the similarly lo-fi *Nebraska* and the glorious bombast of *Born In The U.S.A.*. This was a time when, in Springsteen's own words, he was "still a little gun shy of fame", perhaps at some level anticipating the coming storm.

There's a similar sense of contingency about 1994's *Streets Of Philadelphia Sessions*, an album built upon sparse synths and hypnotic loops. In the event, Springsteen reunited with the E Street Band rather than release an album that's less radical than its reputation suggests.

Faithless represents music for a film as yet never made.

© Neal Preston

Somewhere North Of Nashville is a lighter, country-tinged cousin to *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*. The mariachi-influenced *Inyo* explores the Mexican émigré experience.

2019's *Twilight Hours*, written simultaneously with *Western Stars*, is an album of lush, orchestral pop that arguably features the overall collection's best song, the epic *High Sierra*, in which Springsteen channels Jimmy Webb.

That leaves just *Perfect World*: in Springsteen's estimation, it's an outlier in being a collection of songs culled from different sessions. Stompers abound, although the anxiety expressed by the protagonist of *I'm Not Sleeping* reminds you that even stadium Springsteen's simplest songs contain hidden depths.

It's essential for die-hard fans, but a 20-track version collects the strongest material. **Jonathan Wright**

RICHARD ASHCROFT
ALONE WITH EVERYBODY/HUMAN CONDITIONS/KEYS TO THE WORLD

PROPER

★★★★☆ / ★★★☆☆ / ★★★★☆

When The Verve announced their first split following the 10 million-selling success of third album *Urban Hymns*, all eyes were on Richard Ashcroft as he launched his solo career with *A Song For The Lovers* in the spring of 2000.

That lead single with lush orchestration courtesy of former Verve collaborator Wil Malone remains a highlight of its parent album *Alone With Everybody* and this trio of vinyl reissues certainly presents these songs in their best light – Malone's string arrangements on the debut LP have never sounded better.

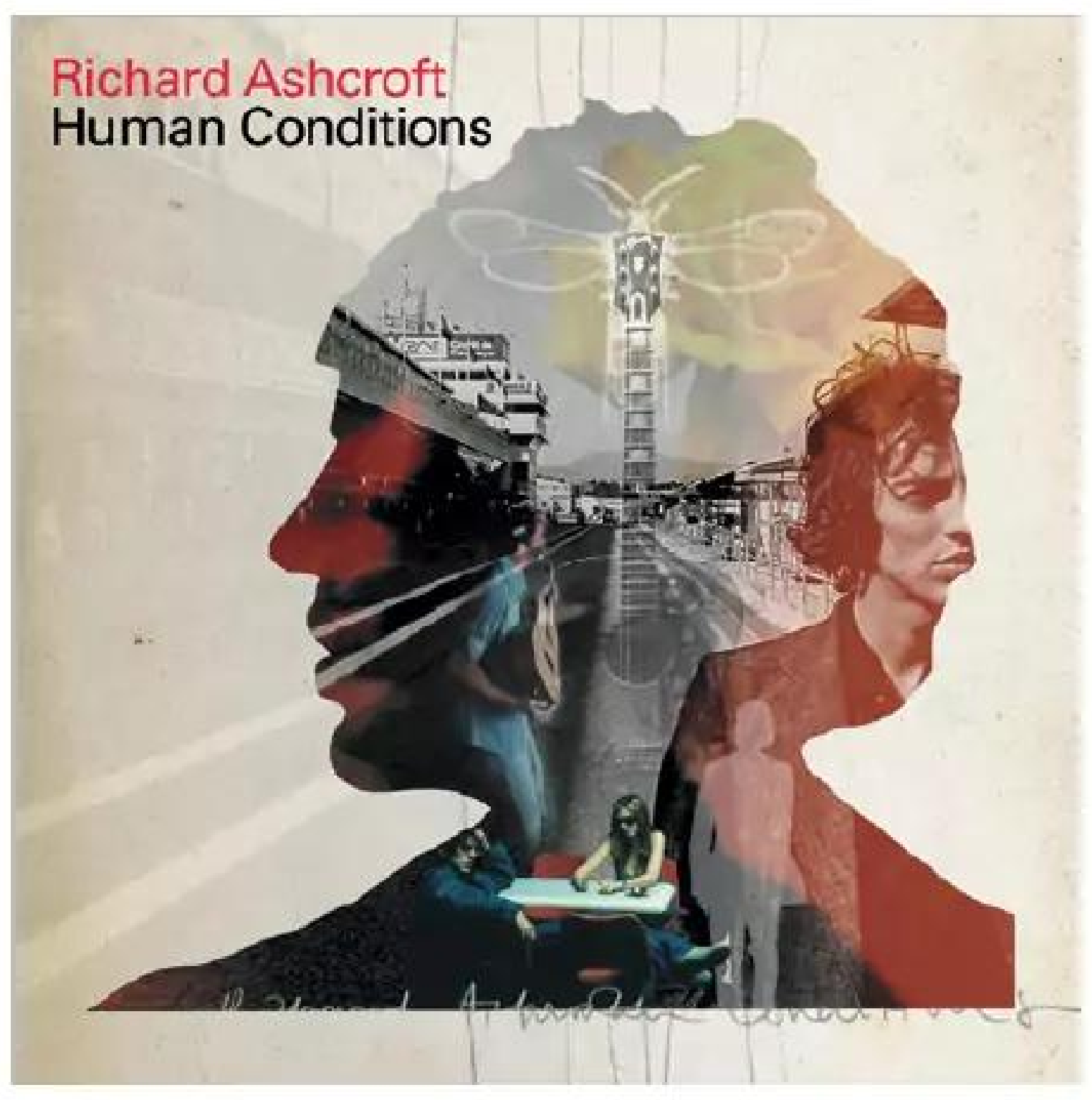
Alone With Everybody also sees pedal steel sessioner BJ Cole valiantly attempting to fill the sonic hole left by Nick McCabe – he's on a hiding to nothing, really – but Ashcroft's songwriting is pretty solid here, particularly on emotive ballad *You On My Mind In My Sleep* as well as rockers *New York* and *Money To Burn.*

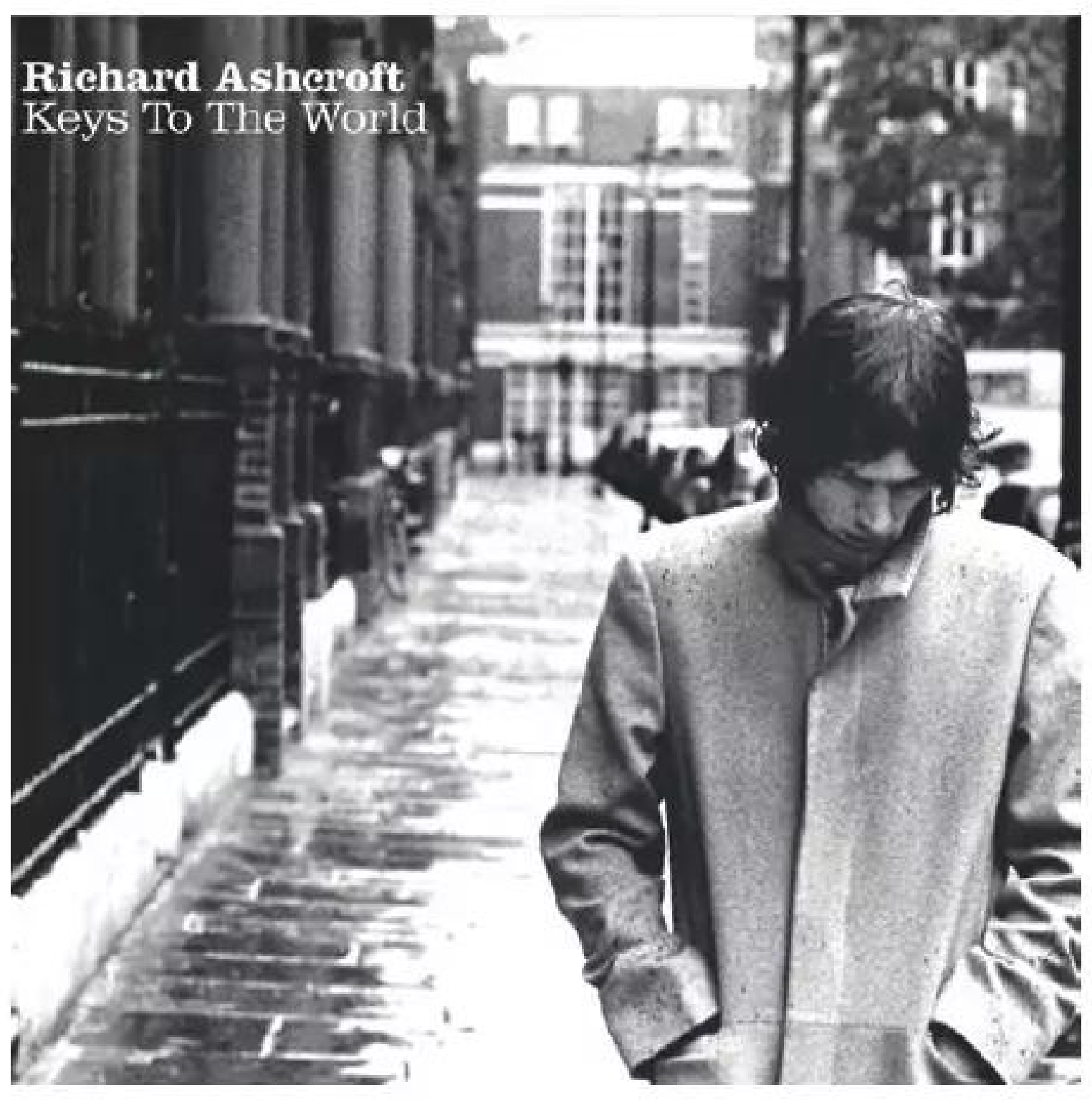
Follow-up LP *Human Conditions* often fails to get out of first gear, though, mired in plodding arrangements and Ashcroft seemingly on autopilot.

Check The Meaning is the standout but could have been trimmed from its eight-minute runtime, *Buy It In Bottles* is a top-tier Ashcroft strumalong and there's a lump-in-the-throat moment at the tail courtesy of the late Brian Wilson's harmonies on *Nature Is The Law.*

Thankfully, Ashcroft upped his game once again for third solo album *Keys To The World.* There's real fire in his belly on the blistering *Why Not Nothing?*, *Cry Til The Morning* is strikingly committed and a hefty percussive thump drives the title track. Meanwhile, in *Break The Night With Colour*, Ashcroft minted one of his finest solo efforts to date and a live setlist favourite for years to come. **Steve Harnell**

Richard Ashcroft
Alone With Everybody





VARIOUS ARTISTS

NOW 12" 80s: 1985 PART ONE/ NOW YEARBOOK '97

NOW

★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆

As sure as night follows day, *NOW 12" 80s 1985* sees the latest instalment of NOW's round-ups move onto the second half of the decade.

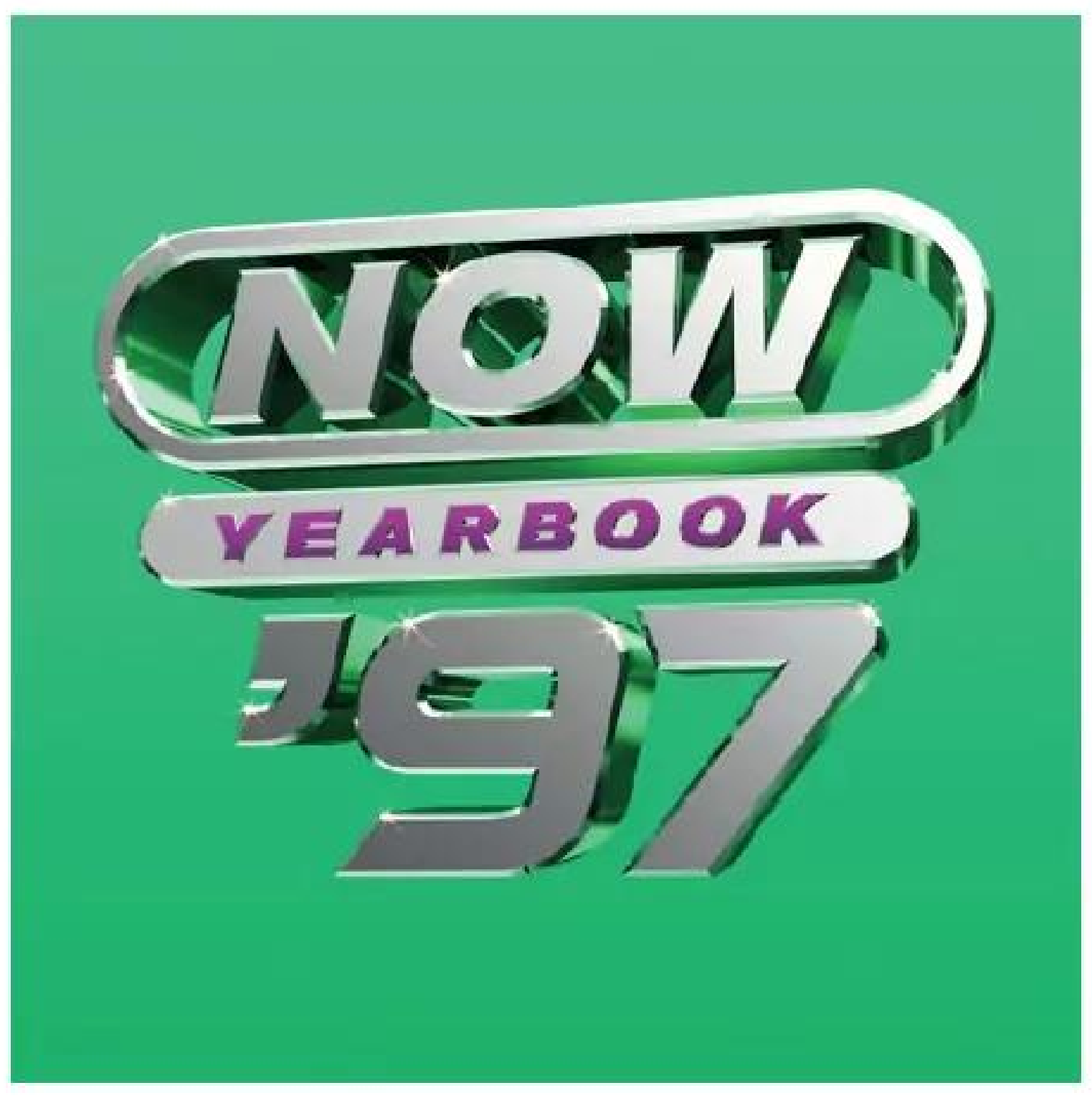
After the frankly rude spread of amazingness of NOW's 1984 editions, by 1985 the 12" had got savvier and the age of the remixer was ushered in to sprinkle some club-friendly fairy dust across pop. This included bigger and drummier extensions on cuts such as Phil Collins And Philip Bailey's *Easy Lover*, Tears For Fears' *Shout* and The Power Station's *Some Like It Hot*, or Shep Pettibone brought onboard to extend Level 42's reach on *Something About You*.

NOW
12" 80s
1985
PART ONE

The inklings of house were starting to show with Colonel Abrams' *Trapped* and the high energy of before was mutating to meet dancefloor demand, with Sheryl Lee Ralph's exquisite *In The Evening* and New Order's *The Perfect Kiss*.

While 1985 may not be considered top tier 80s, it was only because it was more transitional and had so much other goodness to live up to.

The *Yearbook* series meanwhile zings to 1997, a year where guitars were still very much in vogue (Cast, The Seahorses, Kula Shaker, Embrace, Cardigans), the rise of a new dawn of pop under the dominance of Spice Girls (Steps, Aqua, Five, All Saints), big returns (Texas, En Vogue, Echo And The Bunnymen) and the ongoing flood of dance music (Blue Boy, Sash!, Ultra Nate, Dario G, Olive).



Featuring some of the biggest sellers of the decade including Natalie Imbruglia's *Torn*, Tori Amos' Armand van Helden-assisted *Professional Widow* and indeed one of the actual biggest-sellers of all time in Elton John's B-side to his Princess Diana tribute on *Something About The Way You Look Tonight*.

Fools may dismiss 1997 as one of the decade's weakest years. While there are some notable omissions due to the vagaries of licensing and whatnot, you can't argue with an album featuring Radiohead's *Paranoid Android*, Hanson's *MMMBop*, Tina Moore's *Never Gonna Let You Go* and The Chemical Brothers' *Block Rockin' Beats* on. **Ian Wade**

WANG CHUNG

CLEAR LIGHT, DARK MATTER

SING

★★★★☆

Anyone who's only familiar with Wang Chung due to their polished 80s party jam *Everybody Have Fun Tonight* or the moody *Dance Hall Days* might be surprised by the band's artsier roots (and original name, Huang Chung).

However, singer/guitarist Jack Hues and guitarist Nick Feldman once played in a band alongside a pre-Heaven 17 Glenn Gregory and original Adam And The Ants bassist Leigh Gorman. And, after starting Huang Chung, the pair received airplay from John Peel on the strength of 1980's jittery *Isn't It About Time We Were On TV*, before issuing decidedly uncommercial post-punk singles such as *Ti Na Na*.

黃
WANG
CHUNG
鐘
CLEAR LIGHT / DARK MATTER

This excellent 2CD set highlights these obscure early corners of the band's back catalogue, alongside slicker new wave mood pieces like *To Live And Die In L.A.* and later work typified by 1997's quirky *Space Junk*.

But the compilation's lesser-known tracks are the stars here. B-sides including the Japan-esque *The Waves* and the darkwave rough gem *Ornamental Elephant* stand out, as does newly mixed previously unreleased tune, *Separate Lives*, originally recorded for 1982 debut album *Huang Chung*. Appropriately enough, it ends on a peppy note with Erick Kupper's remix of *Everybody Have Fun Tonight* – a command that's easy to follow here. **Annie Zaleski**

MONACO

MUSIC FOR PLEASURE/MONACO

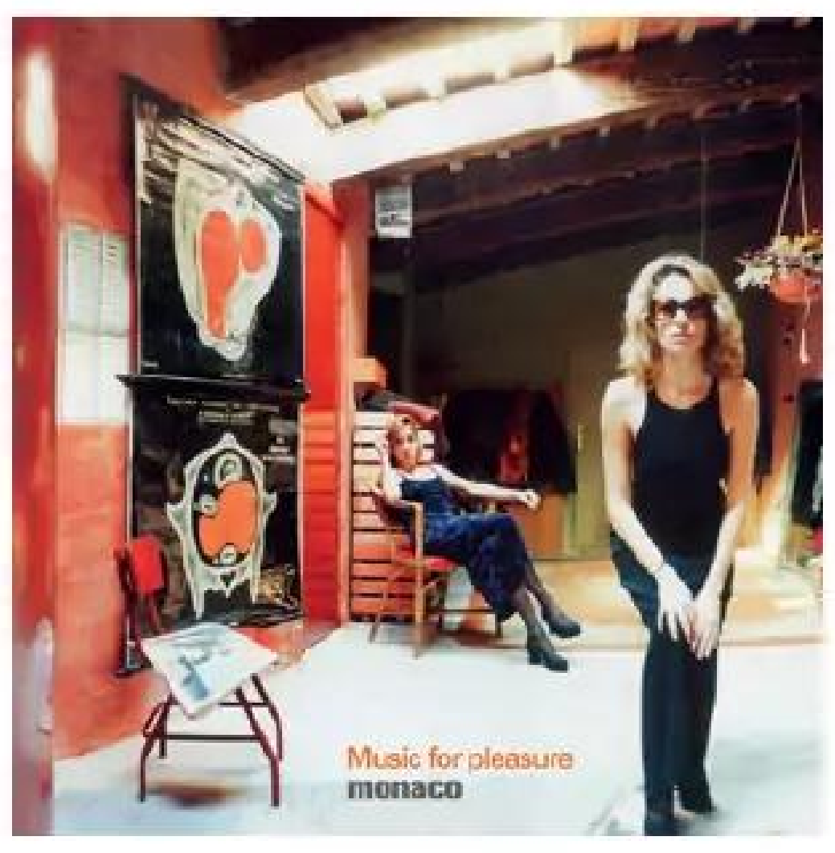
MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆

It's the mid-90s. New Order are "on hiatus", so what's Peter Hook to do with his time other than a bit part in his wife Caroline Aherne's Mrs Merton TV show? With previous side-project Revenge over, David Potts is recruited from that band to launch Monaco: essentially, the continuity New Order.

It's not just Hooky's inimitable bass; Potts' vocals share the same timbre as Bernard Sumner's, the lyrics a similar guilelessness. Even *Music For Pleasure's* sleeve is a Peter Saville job.

What Do You Want From Me? and *Sweet Lips* were the pop hits, but it's the slower, more reflective tracks that strike hardest.



2000's self-titled follow-up pushed that New Order-shaped envelope further with *A Life Apart* utilising harp, melodica and even choir samples. *Bert's Theme* is a cheeky tribute to Mr Bacharach that interpolates *Do You Know The Way To San Jose*, while *Marine* rides on a drum 'n' bass undercarriage.

But by then New Order had reformed, thus negating any need for Monaco. The album only reached No.84 and disappeared into obscurity.

Both reissues feature extra tracks and are worth (re)discovering; records of deceptive shallows and hidden depths, as well as a high point for their creator. **Beth Simpson**

JAMIROQUAI
DYNAMITE

RHINO

★★★☆☆

Arguably Jamiroquai's final commercial hurrah – it was their last studio effort to spawn a Top 20 hit and reach platinum status – sixth album *Dynamite* initially suggested a reinvention of the acid jazz wheel.

Indeed, with its distorted beatboxing intro, fuzzed-up guitars and muddy funk beats, opening lead single *Feels Just Like It Should* was the dirtiest Jay Kay and co had ever sounded. Apart from the 70s psych-rock of *Black Devil Car*, however, it was otherwise business as usual.

jamiroquai
dynamite

The blissful Stevie Wonder-esque *Seven Days In Sunny June* harked back to the early 90s when Kay was just as famous for his elaborate headwear as his soulful voice, while *(Don't) Give Hate A Chance* appeared a blatant attempt to replicate the dancefloor euphoria of *Canned Heat*, Jamiroquai's disco throwback.

Of course, even on autopilot, Jamiroquai still bring a winning slinkiness to their sound.

But this 20th anniversary edition wastes the opportunity to show off further charms, with only its "dynamite smoke"-coloured pressing and promotional sampler CD, featuring five tracks in slightly lengthier form, providing anything different from its reissue on vinyl just three years ago. Less dynamite, more fizzle. **Jon O'Brien**

KAISER CHIEFS
EMPLOYMENT 20

UMR

★★★★☆

Also celebrated with some accompanying shows, the 20th anniversary of Kaiser Chiefs' debut is marked with the deluxe 3CD edition it should have received when the album was reissued on vinyl in 2018.

Alongside the demos is ample proof that the Kaisers were among the last great B-side artists, while the live songs compiled here showcase a band who weren't messing about.

In Stephen Street, they found the perfect producer to harness that energy. *I Predict A Riot* and *Oh My God* flew because there was a wit and charm supporting the lairy boisterousness. It was a mix Street helped ensure stayed fluid throughout.

KAISER
CHIEFS
Employment

Take My Temperature has a heart under its moshpit-inciting rowdy bundle. *Born To Be A Dancer* and *Modern Way* have a mod toughness alongside their empathy. *Time Honoured Tradition* deftly achieves its vaudeville ambitions.

Ricky Wilson brought the humour, his bandmates the steely glint to show they weren't clowning about after all.

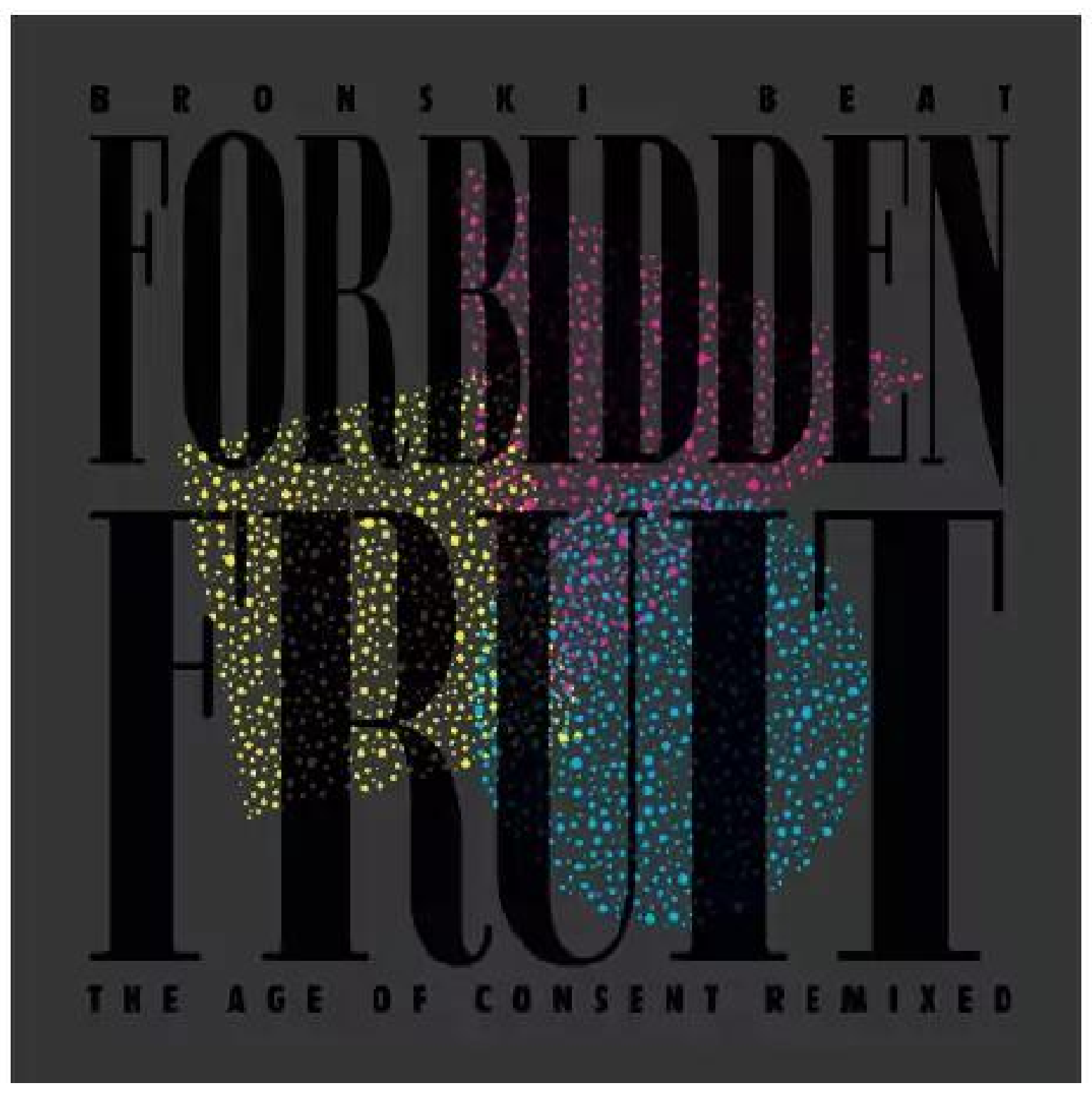
It was irresistible then and still packs a punch now, the schmaltzy *Team Mate* the sole misstep on an album which entered the UK chart at No.3 while 50 Cent and his risible G-Unit collective held the top spot. Twenty years on, it's *Employment* which still deserves to gain entry in da club. **JE**

BRONSKI BEAT
FORBIDDEN FRUIT: THE AGE OF CONSENT REMIXES

LONDON

★★★★☆

Impressively, the 40th anniversary edition of Bronski Beat's debut wasn't the last word on *The Age Of Consent* after all. In the spirit of their original remix album *Hundreds And Thousands*, this companion is a contemporary overhaul. The 11-track CD (and seven-track LP) includes a physical release for previously digital-only 2024 mixes by Superchumbo, Planningtorock and The Knocks. Superchumbo's vintage style 12" *Why?*, placing Neil Tennant in the middle of the mayhem, is the clear winner.



The compilation's smart move is to give new extensions to album tracks which didn't receive a remix at the time. So Kinky Roland (as RSF Metropol) gets to work on *Love And Money* and *Need A Man Blues*, the latter an excellent combination of modern bass and none-more-'84 keyboard percussion FX.

Meanwhile, Ted Carfrae's elegant, jazzy *No More War* is a moment of calm offset by the bass' rumbling disquiet, before Christopher Frost's minimal, metronomic *Screaming*.

The absolute picks are Gareth Jones bringing out an unexpected Krautrock side in his robotic take on *Junk*, and the superb revelation of the long talked about 16-minute *Ultramix* of *I Feel Love/Love To Love You Baby*. **JE**

EVERYTHING EVERYTHING
GET TO HEAVEN

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★★☆

As Everything Everything hunkered down to write their third album in 2015, frontman Jonathan Higgs chose to spend the better part of a year immersed in watching the news. This media saturation spilled out into the Manchester quartet's lyrics, which pulled no punches addressing contemporary politics and the state of the world, often with a cynical (if not pragmatic) view of how things were.

Conversely, however, the Stuart Price-produced *Get To Heaven* doesn't wallow in sonic darkness. Instead, the band veer between electronic pastiche (*Distant Past*), strident R&B (*Regret*), bustling mathrock (*Blast Doors*), and sparks-flying indie (*The Wheel (Is Turning Now)*).

This expanded 10th anniversary edition builds on the solid foundation of the original. First, the 2LP set tacks on the six songs from the original 2015 deluxe edition, led by the Bloc Party-esque *President Heartbeat*. Next are the rarities, which are top notch and eclectic – the pulsating synth-pop of *Live Intro*; snarled indie rocker *Magnetophone*; and the serene *To The Blade (To The Bone)*.

Meanwhile, the demos of *Indigo* and *Give Me Your Blood* are both Radiohead-esque.

A decade on, both the themes and music of *Get To Heaven* still sound vital: brutally honest, forward-thinking and uncompromising. **AZ**

BRIAN
UNDERSTOOD

NEEDLE MYTHOLOGY

★★★★☆

A proper cult album, Dubliner Ken Sweeney's debut *Understand* as Brian in 1992 is spoken of in hushed tones by those who cherished its ultra-brief acclaim in the post-grunge and pre-Britpop landscape.

Joining fellow Irish artists such as The Divine Comedy, A House and The Frank And Walters on Setanta, Brian hoovered up good reviews but was uncomfortable playing live, while focusing on Sweeney's journalism career meant that it was another seven years before Brian's only other album *Bring Trouble* appeared, torpedoed partly by disputes with Setanta over its production.

Renamed *Understood* to show Sweeney is over the break-up which inspired the album, it's easy to hear his influences: The Go-Betweens, The Blue Nile, *Murmur*-era REM and The Smiths at their gentlest. It's the way Brian fuses them together so beautifully which makes *Understood* a thing of wonder.

Yes, there's a gentle bounce to the title track; sure, there's a hint of The Wedding Present snark in *You Don't Want A Boyfriend*; granted, *You Can't Call Home* has the same electric pleasure/pain in its buzzsawing guitar as licking a battery. However, as exemplified by the addition of standalone EP *Planes Stacking Up* and unreleased treasure *If You Knew*, throughout Brian manages to sound warm, empathetic and yet utterly desolate. **JE**

BRIAN
Understood

GWEN McCRAE
ON MY WAY

ATLANTIC

★★★★☆

We lost a soul powerhouse when Gwen McCrae died in February. The variety of tributes showed how McCrae had tried on gospel, funk, disco and was acclaimed as a Northern Soul touchstone: The Queen Of Rare Groove, no less. McCrae was also the first to release a cover of *Always On My Mind*.

While she may have been seen as somewhat in her husband George's shadow after he hit globally with the disco-inventing *Rock Your Baby* – originally meant for Gwen – she more than held her own with classics such as the answer song *Rockin' Chair* and the directional *All This Love That I'm Giving*, and saw her work sampled by the likes of Cassius, Lady Gaga, and even Cypress Hill.

By 1982, with her marriage to George long over and newly signed to Atlantic, McCrae issued *On My Way*, which features the effervescent belter *Keep The Fire Burning* and is the standout here, on what is a very 1982 affair.

With smudges of 80sness on the strutting title track and the closing *Doin' It*, plus the cheery slap of *Hey World* alongside smoochers galore including *Make Believe*, if you're new to McCrae's rich legacy, then you could do much worse than start with this rightly acclaimed set, here reissued on lipstick-coloured vinyl. **IW**

GWEN McCRAE
ON MY WAY

NIALL HORAN
HEARTBREAK WEATHER

CAPITOL

★★★½☆

Very much the underdog following One Direction's split, Niall Horan has gradually evolved into a self-assured and inherently likeable singer-songwriter, second only to Harry Styles in their solo career stakes. Given a slightly premature re-release – is a fifth anniversary really worthy of celebrating? – Horan's chart-topping second album shows how he's quietly continued to thrive.

The title track and equally melodic *New Angel* both channel the adult contemporary pop that spearheaded The Jonas Brothers' triumphant comeback.

Fully committing to the album's break-up concept, *Put A Little Love On Me* and *Still* are heartfelt sadboy ballads which allow the pin-up to showcase a previously hidden vulnerability.

In stark contrast, lead single *Nice To Meet Ya* is a glorious burst of Kasabian-esque indie swagger that would have spent many weeks at No.1 if it had been released by Horan's much-fawned-over bandmate.

This expanded vinyl edition also collates international bonus tracks *Nothing* and *Dress*, the latter's Celtic flourishes offering a rare sign of his roots.

Meanwhile, live recordings from London's Royal Albert Hall, Air Studios and a Vevo session highlight how, despite a relatively low profile, Horan is still able to sell out arenas on both sides of the Atlantic. **JO**

HEARTBREAK
WEATHER
NIALL HORAN

ROD STEWART
ULTIMATE HITS

WARNER

★★★★☆

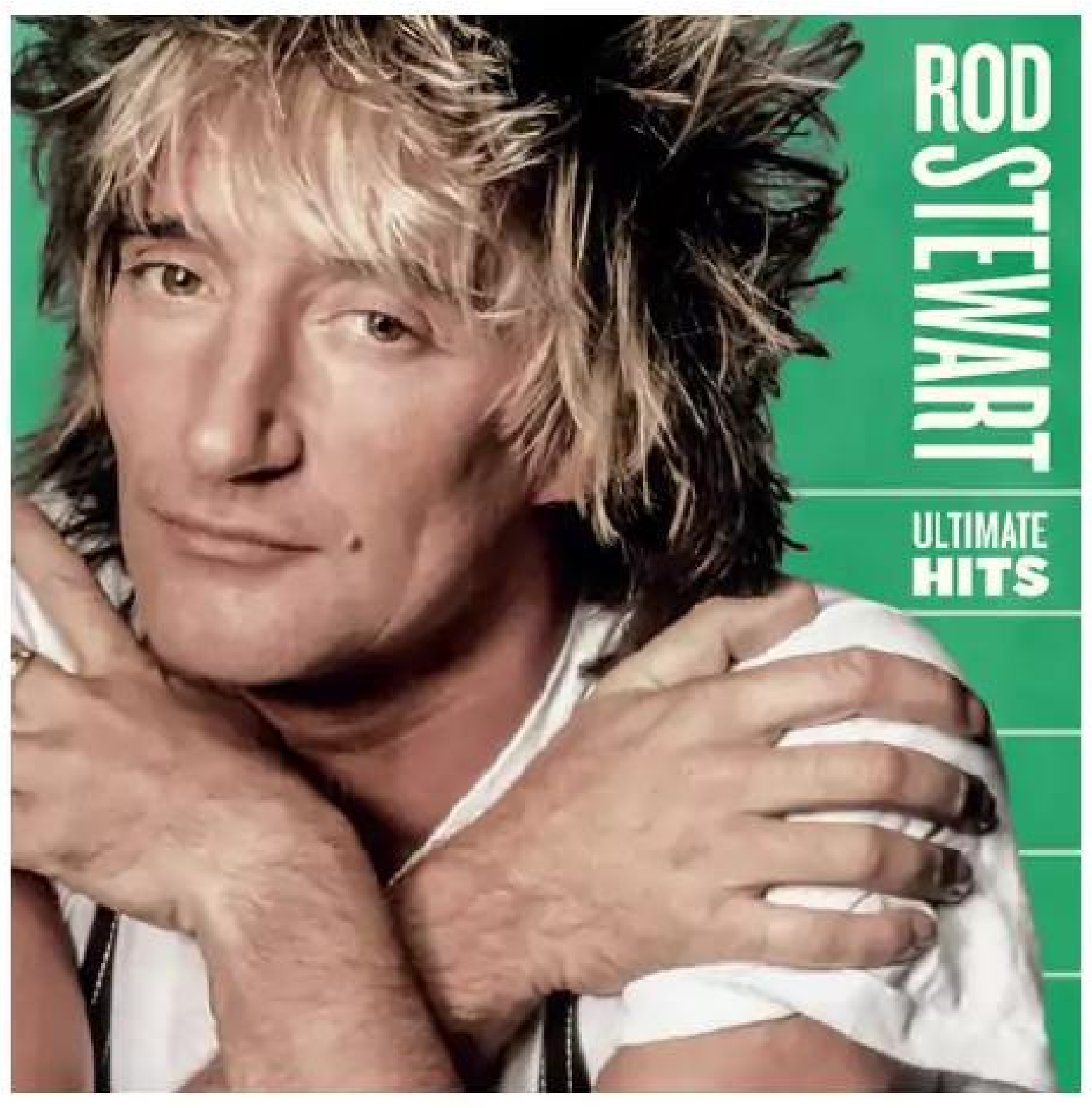
Rod Stewart is 80 (!) and fresh from Glastonbury's legends slot, so to celebrate he's giving us another hits set.

Every household requires a Rod Stewart compilation, and there's bonus points if you still have 1979's *Greatest Hits* in the sleeve featuring his iconic pink silk suit (fun fact: an unlikely inspiration on early Suede). That didn't mess about and nor does this updated version.

Condensing the booze-fond leather-lunged lothario's career of 147 singles down to 30 songs was always going to be fraught with omissions, but *Ultimate Hits* does a jolly good job, charting highlights from *Handbags And Gladrags* through to *Almost Like Being In Love* from Stewart's chart-topping collaboration with Jools Holland from 2024.

Whether it's (tartan) flag waving anthems such as *Sailing*, his ahead-of-its-time meditation on homophobic attacks on the heartfelt *The Killing Of Georgie* and fruity leopardskin-donned rompers like *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy* and the "different times" strutter *Hot Legs*, Stewart has also been a keen vessel for songs by Robert Palmer (*Some Guys Have All The Luck*), Van Morrison (*Have I Told You Lately…*), Fats Waller (*Ain't Misbehavin'*) and Tom Waits (*Downtown Train*).

It makes *Ultimate Hits* a joyful, celebratory run through a 60-year career of one of Britain's best-loved artists. **IW**



FOREVER NOW FESTIVAL
NATIONAL BOWL, MILTON KEYNES

22 JUNE

★★★★☆

Following hot on the heels of Yungblud's Bludfest, Forever Now promised a one-day event packed with many of the greatest pioneers of new wave, post-punk and alt-rock.

CP hit the ground early with Kirk Brandon's Theatre Of Hate on the Other Stage, who played a tight and brooding set, before heading over to the main stage to catch The Psychedelic Furs and a playful Richard Butler. While *President Gas* was the first – but not the last – track of the day to reference political circumstances on a weekend when the US bombed Iran, *Heaven* and *Love My Way* soon wrapped fans back up in the warmth of the Furs.

Moving on to the Other Stage, John Lydon was in imperious form, commanding a huge audience in a field not big enough for his charisma, while the Happy Mondays followed with a predictably chaotic set.

Meanwhile, on the main stage, our tag team kept tabs on a delighted Johnny Marr, who rewarded fans with a polished mix of his solo material, highlights from The Smiths, Electronic's *Getting Away With It* and a cover of Iggy Pop's *The Passenger*.

Billy Idol struck perhaps the most discordant moment – for this festivalgoer at least – with his 80s metal schtick feeling at odds with the day.

As dusk began to fall, The The had fans revelling with *The Beat(en) Generation* and *Dogs Of Lust*, before Matt Johnson brought a tear to this writer's eye remembering how he penned *I've Been Waitin' For Tomorrow (All Of My Life)* as an 18-year-old daydreaming his future as a plane flew past the window.

The Other Stage rumbled on with The Damned, Jesus & Mary Chain and Death Cult giving heft to the post-punk/goth claims of the organisers, but *CP* only had eyes for headline act Kraftwerk. A visual tour de force, *Computer World*, *Radioactivity*, *Autobahn*, and an epic *Tour de France* was electronic heaven.

Forever Now wasn't without hiccups, but overall delivered massively with a memorable 10 hours for our group of one-time goths and misfits. **Jon Bickley**

KYLIE MINOGUE
BP PULSE ARENA, BIRMINGHAM

31 MAY

★★★★★

© Chloe Irving

RETURNING FOR HER BIGGEST UK ARENA TOUR SINCE 2018, KYLIE DELVES INTO EVERY CORNER OF HER CATALOGUE FOR A EUPHORIC NIGHT OF SURPRISES

A few days after celebrating her 57th birthday (with The Blessed Madonna DJing), Kylie is on a high – and we don't just mean her state of mind, as she's lifted elegantly through the stage up to the rafters here.

With Australia and Asia behind her, and mainland Europe and Latin American dates ahead, the Tension Tour represents the singer's biggest global excursion since 2011.

Wrapped in a blue skin-tight number, tonight's opening section sees her jump straight into tracks from *Tension II*, *Light Years*, *Aphrodite* and even *Rhythm Of Love*, although it's *Fever*'s *Come Into My World* which is the first real standout, sliding beautifully from piano ballad to banger.

Dipping into her PWL-era, a genuine surprise comes with 1991's house-pop hit *Shocked* as original rapper Jazzi P unexpectedly bounds into view to deliver her word-perfect rhyme for the first time in decades.

Further surprises follow as Kylie confesses *Dancing*, the hooky highlight from her Nashville-inspired *Golden*, nearly didn't make the set, while a foray into the crowd for a series of stripped-down a cappella snippets leaves her gobsmacked.

Chatting to the audience, she chances upon Stuart, at his 105th Kylie gig (and nearly fainting with joy), and then a young, costumed Leo, at his first show, waving a sign: 'I'm dressed as Jason especially for you.' Hugging the elder and serenading the younger, it's a heart-warming moment that leaves both singer and fans visibly moved.

Moving on, we're then firmly back on the dancefloor for a confident run of solid beat-filled bangers, including the sweeping *Confide In Me*, *Body Language*'s writhing *Slow*, and *Tension* anthem *Padam Padam*.

Naturally, there are plenty of omissions, but overall the setlist is perfectly paced, with even the twee *Locomotion* – a track that should have long left the station – finding its place.

Meanwhile, the staging weaves in plenty of visually engaging routines, from a choreographed choo-chooing for the aforementioned *Locomotion* to dancers wearing primary-coloured inflatable costumes that wouldn't look out of place at a Bauhaus art school performance.

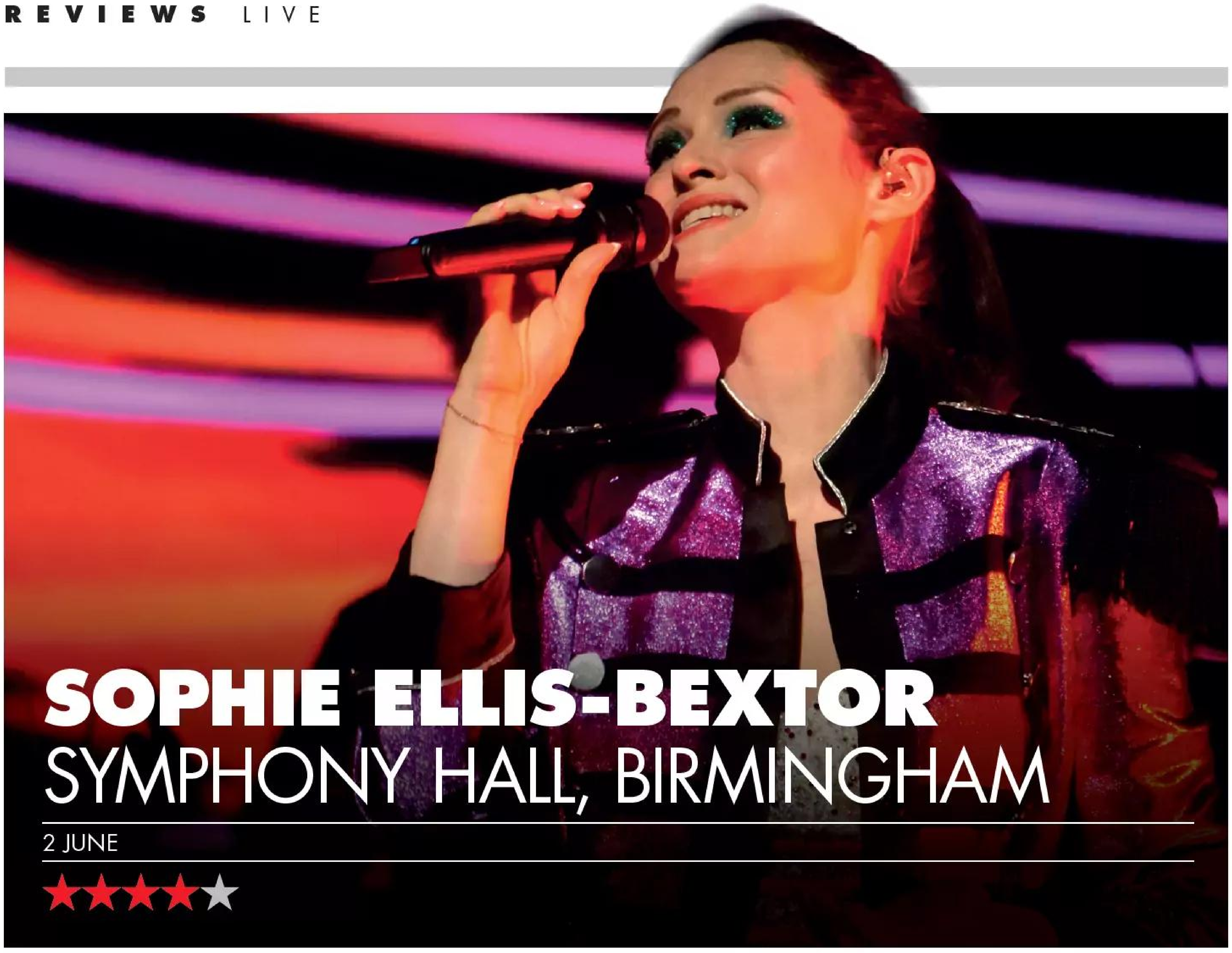
In a 37-year music career, Kylie's reinvented herself numerous times, with her most successful periods often borne from her canny ability to combine seemingly opposing ideals.

Tonight, that manifests itself in her being able to rock a simple red jumpsuit as comfortably as haute couture, while effortlessly marrying contemporary pop with less mainstream electronica and club beats.

Served with a personable warmth and contagious enthusiasm, the end result is one helluva party. Guaranteed. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST
① Lights Camera Action
② In Your Eyes
③ Get Outta My Way
④ What Do I Have To Do?
⑤ Come Into My World
⑥ Good As Gone
⑦ Spinning Around
⑧ Taboo
⑨ On a Night Like This
⑩ Last Night I Dreamt I Fell In love
⑪ Better The Devil You Know
⑫ Shocked
⑬ Things We Do For Love
⑭ Dancing
⑮ Locomotion
⑯ Hold On To Now
⑰ Celebrate You / Je Ne Sais Pas Pourquoi / Never Too Late / Especially For You / Where The Wild Roses Grow
⑱ Say Something
⑲ Supernova / Real Groove / Magic / Where Does The DJ Go?
⑳ Confide In Me
㉑ Slow
㉒ Timebomb
㉓ Edge Of Saturday Night
㉔ Tension
㉕ Can't Get You Out Of My Head
㉖ All The Lovers

ENCORE
㉗ Padam Padam
㉘ Love At First Sight



© Dave Freak

SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR
SYMPHONY HALL, BIRMINGHAM

2 JUNE

★★★★☆

THE KITCHEN DISCO DIVA HITS THE ROAD WITH HER PERIMENOPOP TOUR AND MAKES THE MOST OF THE FINEST ACOUSTICS IN THE COUNTRY

There are a couple of pin-drop moments in Sophie Ellis-Bextor's gig tonight, with the first actually involving a pin...

After the percussive fun fair disco of *Relentless Love* and similarly paced *Music Gets The Best Of Me*, the Kitchen Disco Queen proudly demonstrates her backstage research skills.

Gleefully reeling off a series of Birmingham-based anecdotes, she winds up on the fun fact that tonight's venue has the seventh best acoustics in the world, and the finest in the UK.

Confirmation of the venue's world-class acoustic status can be proven using a "pin drop test" – with the landing object hopefully audible throughout the hall. Keen to test the methodology, Sophie requests complete silence, dropping a pin onto the stage – and it transpires that it does indeed pass her experiment with flying colours.

It's a delightful interlude in a night of crowd-pleasing disco pop as Sophie's amusingly titled Perimenopop Tour aims firmly for the dancefloor.

A couple of new tunes bode well for the accompanying new album (due September), but it's the more established tracks that power the show, including the pulsating beats of her Felix Jaehn team-up, *Ready For Your Love*, and the ay-ay-ay-ing *Get Over You*, both of which gets the audience dancing.

And the throng remain on their feet for a seamless segment featuring Modjo's *Lady*, *Groovejet* and *Can't Fight This Feeling* (the housey Junior Caldera single and not the REO Speedwagon one), with the latter neatly segueing into ABBA's *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)*.

Modjo and ABBA renditions aside, other covers – *I Feel Love* and *Like A Prayer* – though polished, are too dry, while Sophie's button-pushing random song selection is a nice idea that's left a little under-baked.

These, however, are the only minor criticisms in an otherwise upbeat set that culminates with a killer *Murder On The Dancefloor*.

But there's just time for one last 'pin drop' moment. As the encoring band play out the electro *Bittersweet*, the charming Sophie and guitarist Pablo Tato vanish from the stage only to reappear on the circle's balcony for a surprise throwback to her time fronting late-90s indie hopefuls theaudience.

Ditching the amplification, and illuminated by a single spotlight, the duo's hushed acoustic take on *A Pessimist Is Never Disappointed* accentuates the subtle vibrato in the singer's distinctive voice.

No actual pins dropped this time, but you could probably hear the crowd roar in the next city. **DF**

SETLIST

1. Relentless Love
2. Music Gets The Best Of Me
3. Taste
4. Hypnotized
5. Today The Sun's On Us
6. Young Blood
7. Hearing In Colour
8. Ready For Your Love
9. Dolce Vita
10. Get Over You
11. Lady (Hear Me Tonight)
12. Groovejet (If This Ain't Love)
13. Can't Fight This Feeling
14. Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)
15. Freedom Of The Night
16. I Feel Love
17. Not Giving Up On Love
18. Crying At The Discoteque
19. Like A Prayer
20. Heartbreak (Make Me A Dancer)
21. Murder On The Dancefloor

ENCORE

22. Bittersweet
23. A Pessimist Is Never Disappointed

JERRY HARRISON & ADRIAN BELEW: REMAIN IN LIGHT
WULFRUN HALL, WOLVERHAMPTON

6 JUNE

★★★★☆

Talking Head Jerry Harrison and notable collaborator Adrian Belew reunite for an evening dedicated (in part, at least) to the Heads' fourth studio album, *Remain In Light*.

Arguably their greatest, much like David Byrne and Brian Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* from the same period, it's a richly layered concoction, a sinewy melting pot of funk, new wave, Afrobeat, hip-hop and studio graft. Listening back to the 1980 LP, it's fair to say that live musicians would struggle to recreate a perfect facsimile, but Harrison and Belew certainly give it a good go.

A taut *Psycho Killer* opens before *RIL*'s snaking *Crosseyed And Painless*, both tight. As the nine-piece band sways around them, Harrison stands trance-like while former King Crimson/Bowie guitarist Belew laps up every second. A jittering reinvention of *Houses In Motion*, with Harrison on vocals, is slow to get moving, though the swirling ghostly horns bring a shiver. However, *Born Under Punches* packs a thump and *Cities* benefits from meaty brass.

Leaving the Heads briefly, Harrison's best known solo single, funk-rocker *Rev It Up*, slots in nicely, ditching the late-80s production to stay closer to the Heads' template. The same can be said for Belew's *Thela Hun Ginjeet* – a choice cut from King Crimson's 1981 *Discipline*, *Thela*... is introduced by the singer/guitarist as "something a little different," but in truth, aside from its taped conversation, its angular adventurousness also has much in common with *RIL*-era Heads.

Once In A Lifetime's opening naturally elicits a grand cheer, and although the chorus feels flat, the break kicks. Bringing things back on track, a muscular *Life During Wartime* sees Harrison's monster synth solo rattling the rafters, while Al Green's *Take Me To The River* makes good use of the brass, as well as singers Shari and Sammi.

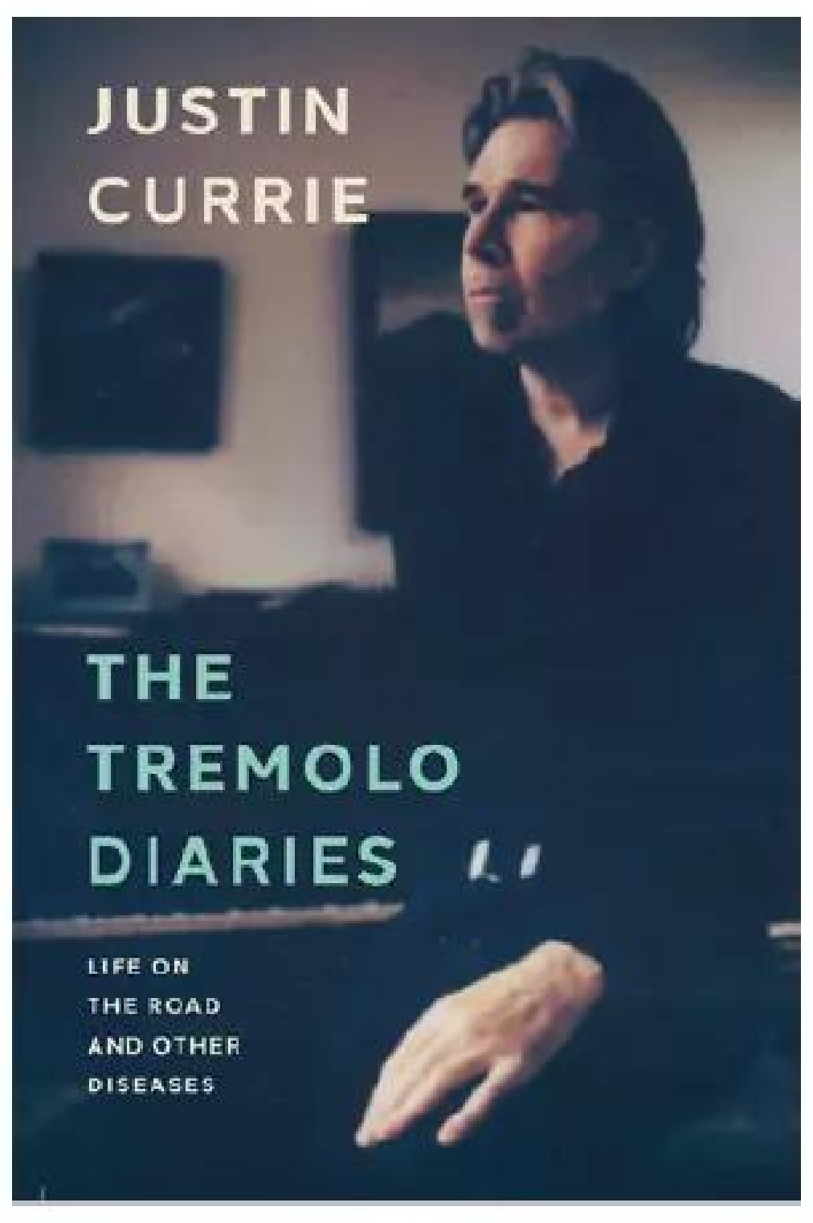
Ending on a near perfect high with the playful yet precise *Drugs* and frantic *The Great Curve*, it's been quite a journey. **DF**

THE TREMOLO DIARIES: LIFE ON THE ROAD AND OTHER DISEASES

JUSTIN CURRIE

NEW MODERN

★★★★½



"I don't want to be remembered for being unwell," writes Justin Currie in *The Tremolo Diaries.* And while the Del Amitri frontman's Parkinson's diagnosis inevitably casts a long shadow over these dispatches from the band's recent US and European tours, the book is about so much more than his "murderous diminishing".

As a songwriter, Currie has always taken a jaundiced view of the world, and recent events – his partner was also paralysed by a stroke in 2022 – have only darkened his outlook. As such, many of his encounters on the road inspire Malcolm Tucker levels of invective, from cheap food ("you wouldn't feed this to Hitler's dog") to fellow artists (The Offspring are a "caterwauling tower of shit") and entire cities (Nashville is "a cattle market for con artists", Washington DC "a giant office dumped in a swamp"). His most savage judgments, though, are often reserved for himself, "a mediocrity" undertaking a "sad and tawdry last turn around the block". (On this, at least, he's wrong.)

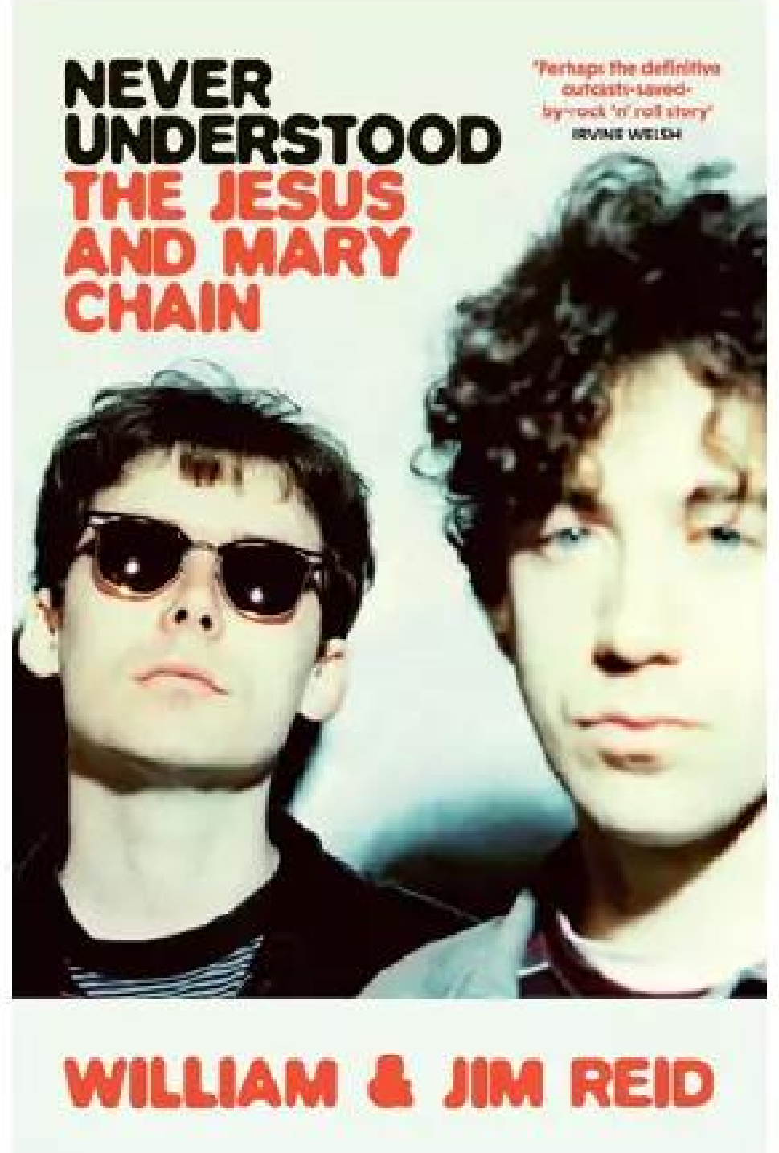
Such lacerating honesty, rare among rock's strutting peacocks, is worth the entry price alone. But Currie's dry humour and novelist's ear for turn of phrase elevate the book into a minor masterpiece. **Paul Kirkley**

NEVER UNDERSTOOD

WILLIAM & JIM REID

ORION BOOKS

★★★★☆



Of all the bands of the 1980s, The Jesus And Mary Chain are among those most cloaked in mystery. They were hardly regulars on the *Saturday Superstore* or *Get Fresh* sofas and didn't play along with *Smash Hits'* brand of tongue-in-cheekery. Their publicity photos, meanwhile, were so dour they made New Order look like the Fast Food Rockers.

Yet there's more humour and vulnerability shown in this first autobiography from William and Jim Reid than you'd expect. This is an oral history, with the brothers offering up sometimes contradictory memories of their past.

Both, however, paint a compellingly bleak picture of their beginnings on an East Kilbride council estate, an area plagued by sectarian violence and unemployment, as they describe how music and films offered them an escape to something better. There are some eye-opening admissions (who knew that Jim loves *Midsomer Murders* or William was a massive Trekkie?) some abrasive asides (John Lydon and Morrissey get a kicking) and memorable verbal flourishes (The Velvet Underground sounded "like Bob Dylan singing with a Motown band who are all on fucking speed and their equipment doesn't work").

Funny and self-effacing, *Never Understood* works well in demystifying this once most opaque of bands. In fact, you may never listen to *Psychocandy* in the same way again. **Steve O'Brien**

OASIS: THEIR BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

PAUL SLATTERY

OMNIBUS

★★★★☆

Tipped off by the band's initial producer Mark Coyle that they were something rather special, photographer Paul Slattery hitched a ride on the Oasis bullet train during their stratospheric rise to fame between the Spring of 1994 and April 1995.

It's quite remarkable how much the band packed into that period, from multiple trips around the UK and North America to a hugely successful eye-opening jaunt to Japan plus countless TV appearances, radio sessions and video shoots.

Slattery's at the heart of the action to capture the grit and grime of the fivepiece's first gigs in all their sweaty, unvarnished glory and there's an unfussy immediacy to his work. Foregoing elaborate set-ups, he's all about capturing the hectic life of a band caught in the eye of a hurricane. Within just a handful of months, Oasis have swapped the cosy confines of Liverpool's Lomax and Bristol's Fleece and Firkin to make it onto the bill of a Creation Records birthday bash staged at the Royal Albert Hall that includes a meeting with Love's Arthur Lee.

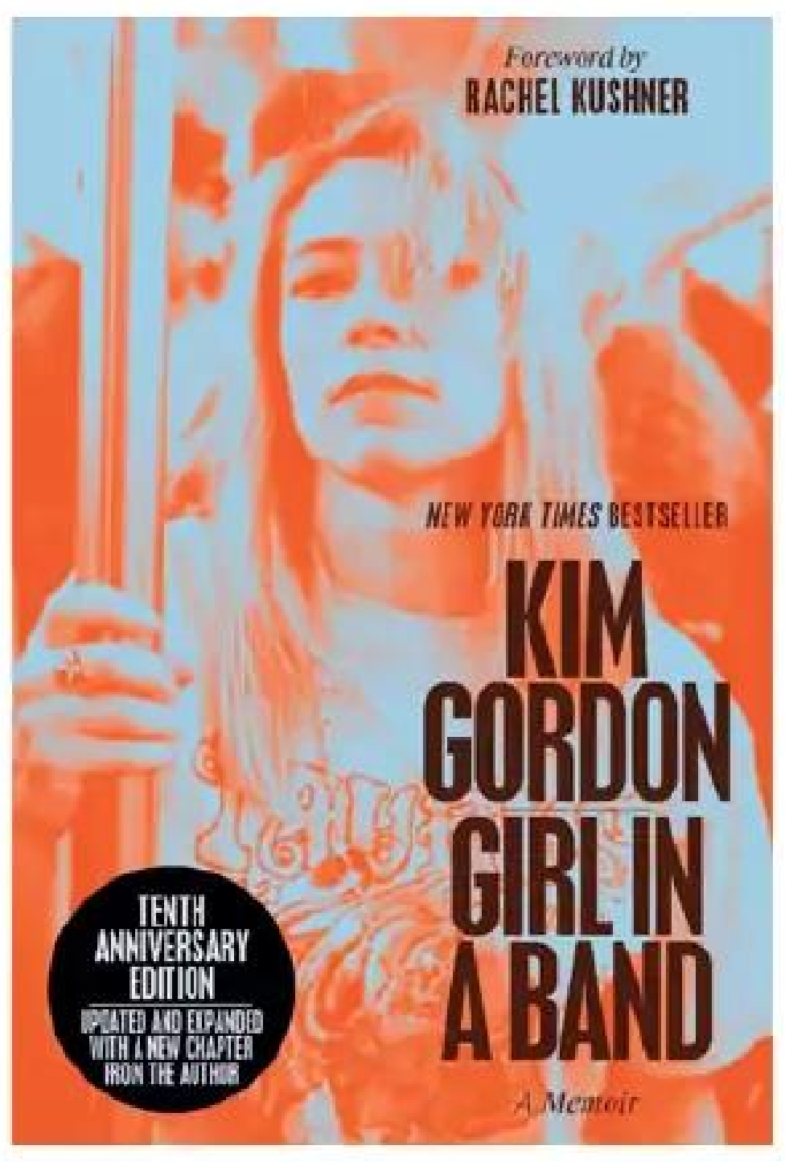
By the time Oasis have made it onto *Late Night With David Letterman* and recorded a stunning Paul Weller-assisted appearance on Channel 4's *The White Room*, they're home and hosed. Slattery's lensmanship gives us a front row seat to present the band in all their wide-eyed glory. **Steve Harnell**

GIRL IN A BAND: TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

KIM GORDON

FABER & FABER

★★★★½



"What's it like to be a girl in a band? / I don't quite understand," raged Sonic Youth's iconic bassist, guitarist, and vocalist Kim Gordon on *Sacred Trickster*, from the band's swansong *The Eternal* in 2009. Six years later, she offered invaluable insight into what it was *actually* like for her with the publication of *Girl In A Band.*

A *New York Times* bestseller when first published in 2015 – and now updated with a new chapter and a foreword by bestselling author Rachel Kushner (*The Mars Room, The Flamethrowers, and Telex From Cuba*) – Gordon's autobiography paints a vivid picture of the 80s and 90s US underground scene: the passion, the belief, the art, and the music.

Beginning at the end, Gordon treads a careful but candid path as she chronicles the formation and evolution of Sonic Youth, her marriage to bandmate Thurston Moore, and the unravelling of both their relationship and the band.

Told with wry wit and enigmatic charm ("I wasn't conscious of being a woman, and over the years I can honestly say I almost never think of 'girliness' unless I'm wearing high heels, and then I'm more likely to feel like a transvestite"), hers is a searing memoir, littered with revealing anecdotes and forthright opinions. Much like Kathleen Hanna's *Rebel Girl: My Life As A Feminist Punk* (2024), Gordon cuts the crap to tell it like it is. **Dan Biggane**

© L J Van Houten/Shutterstock

YAZOO RELEASE *UPSTAIRS AT ERIC'S*

20 AUGUST 1982

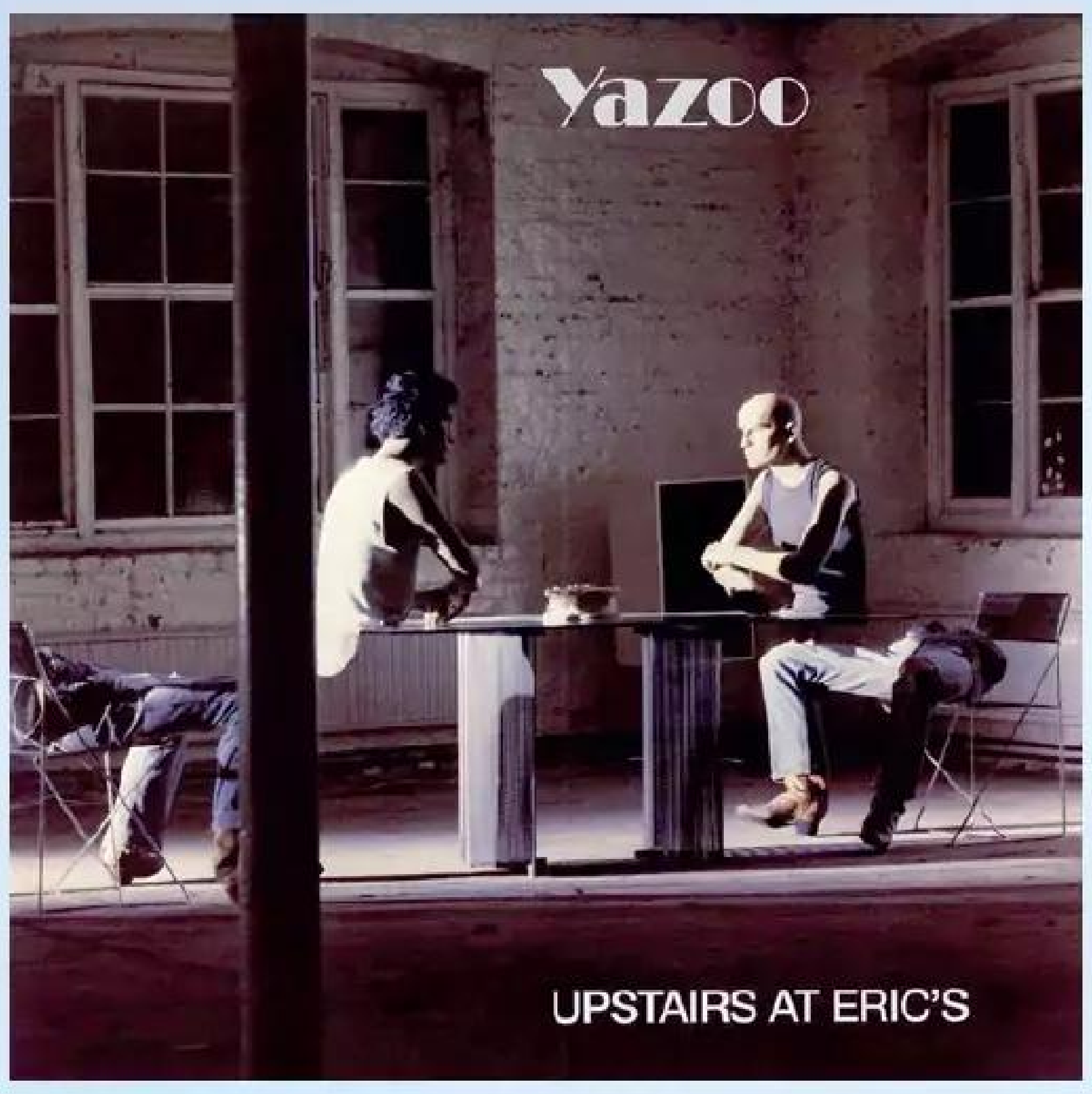
If you have spent the last 43 years pondering "Who *is* Eric?" in relation to the title of Yazoo's first album, the answer is Eric Radcliffe, the owner of Blackwing Studios where Vince Clarke and Alison Moyet recorded their acclaimed debut.

Arriving three months after *Only You* peaked at No.2, *Upstairs At Eric's* saw Clarke return to the only studio he'd ever recorded in, the south-east London premises where he'd waxed his sole album with Depeche Mode, *Speak & Spell.*

Intending to record the LP with that album's producer Daniel Miller, the first hiccup occurred when he discovered that Miller was otherwise engaged, followed by the news that Fad Gadget had already booked the studio.

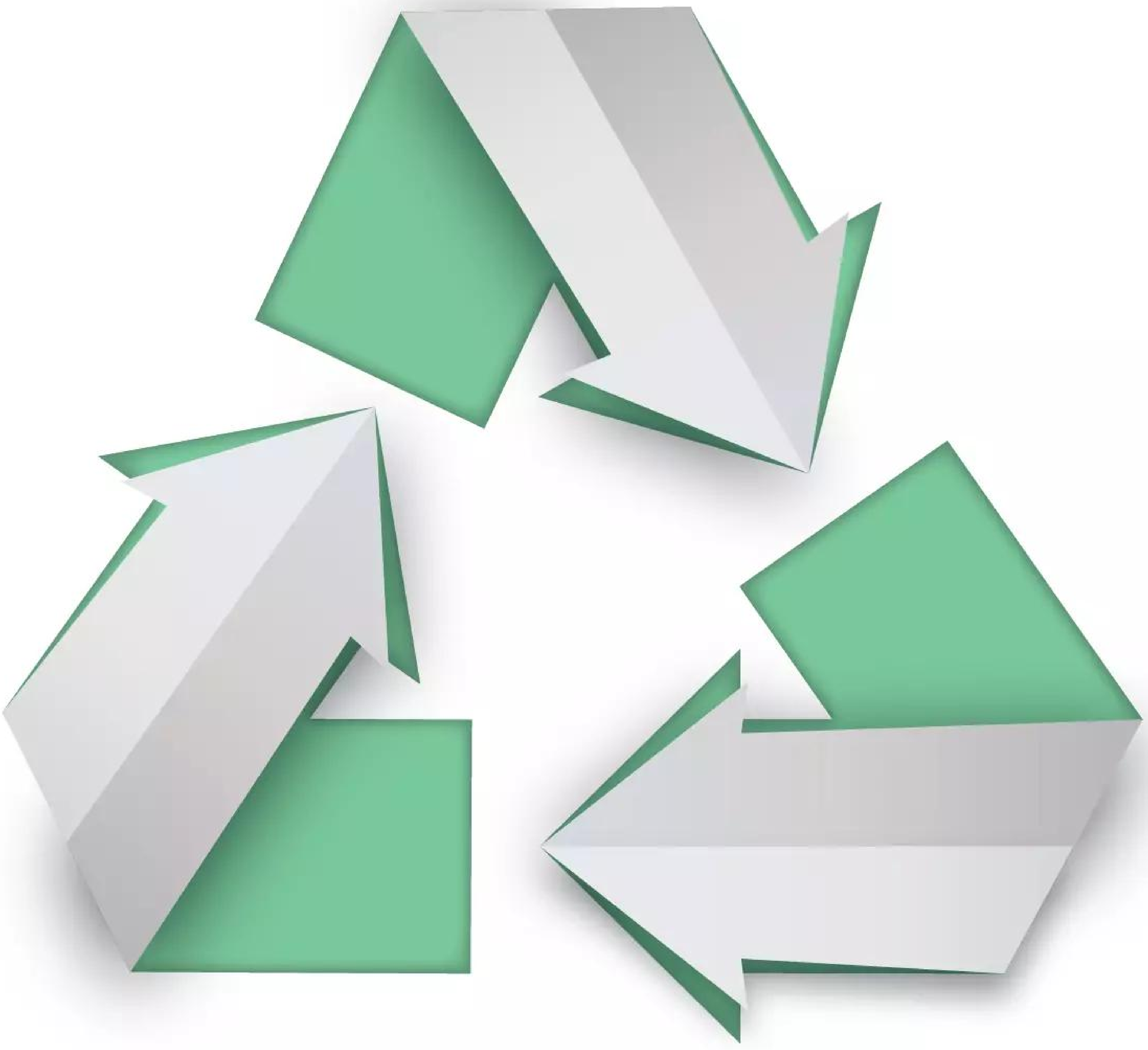
Undeterred, Clarke and Moyet decided to record the album early in the morning, before Gadget turned up, with Radcliffe overseeing the sessions.

Eager to capitalise on the success of *Only You,* Clarke admitted that the planning and recording of their debut long-player was done at speed. "It was very fast, yeah," Clarke told *Classic Pop* in 2013. "Not that we rushed it – it was more that there was no self-indulgence, no space for messing around with it at all."



Upstairs At Eric's was released in August, peaking at No.2 in the UK, and spawned one further single in the No.3-charting *Don't Go.*

And if you're still wondering about Eric, well, he later teamed up with Clarke once more as part of the short-lived The Assembly project and the last we heard, now lives in Gravesend, Kent. **Steve O'Brien**



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